

BR 121

.G35

Copy 1

HELPS TO FAITH

By J. H. GARRISON



Class BR 121

Book .G 35

Copyright N^o

COPYRIGHT DEPOSIT.





HELPS TO FAITH

BY J. H. GARRISON

HELPS TO FAITH. Cloth. . . .	\$1.00
ALONE WITH GOD. Cloth75
HEAVENWARD WAY. Cloth75
HALF-HOUR STUDIES AT THE CROSS. Cloth	.75
A MODERN PLEA FOR ANCIENT TRUTHS.	
Boards35
THE OLD FAITH RESTATED. (Edited).	
Cloth	2.00
REFORMATION OF THE NINETEENTH	
CENTURY. (Edited.) Cloth . .	2.00
RIGHTLY DIVIDING THE WORD. Paper	.05
CONGREGATIONALISTS AND DISCIPLES.	
Paper15
UNION AND VICTORY. Paper05
HIGHER CRITICISM. Paper05
THE DISCIPLES OF CHRIST. Paper (doz.)	.10
OUR MOVEMENT; ITS ORIGIN AND AIM.	
Paper10

HELPS TO FAITH

A Contribution to Theological
Reconstruction

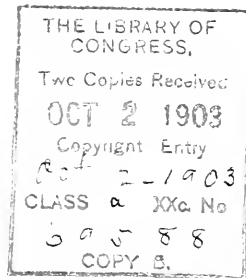
B7

James Harvey
J. H. GARRISON

EDITOR OF THE CHRISTIAN-EVANGELIST

CHRISTIAN PUBLISHING COMPANY
ST. LOUIS.

[1903]



COPYRIGHT, 1903, BY
CHRISTIAN PUBLISHING COMPANY

DEDICATION

To all lovers of Truth who are seeking a stable foundation on which to build a faith that will give strength, comfort, and inspiration for service here, and a triumphant hope for the life hereafter.

PREFACE

IT is with no little diffidence, and with no conscious trace of dogmatism, that the author puts forth this little volume, embodying some of the results of his own thinking, as a humble contribution to that reconstruction in theology which is so marked a feature of our times. The subjects treated, and the manner of treating them, have been determined very largely by the aim of the book, as indicated by its title. The author feels that in this, as in all transition periods in the history of religious thought, there is danger that some will mistake the transient and changing forms of doctrine for the substantial foundations of Christian faith, and in yielding their former doctrinal opinions may surrender, also, their faith in God, and in Jesus Christ, through whom and in whom He has revealed Himself to humanity. He has had in mind, also, those who are untrained in theological subtleties, and whose minds are more or less confused by current discussions, but who sincerely desire to know and to accept the truth concerning the great questions of faith

Preface

and duty, doctrine and destiny. To point out the original sources of faith and to clear away some of the debris of outgrown theories, so as to make faith easier, has been the author's aim in all these studies. May He who often chooses humble instruments to accomplish His wise purposes be pleased to make this volume a help to the faith of many honest, inquiring souls! So shall the author's purpose be fully realized.

CONTENTS

PREFACE	7
INTRODUCTION	13

PART I

SOME FACTS ON WHICH FAITH RESTS

I. TESTIMONY OF THE RELIGIOUS INSTINCTS	19
II. THE DISHARMONY IN MAN'S NATURE	28
III. GOD'S SELF-REVELATION	36
IV. JESUS AS A REVELATION OF GOD	43
V. GIVEN CHRIST, CHRISTIANITY FOLLOWS	51
VI. WHAT THEN SHALL I DO WITH JESUS?	59
VII. LEARNING OF JESUS	67
VIII. AT THE FEET OF JESUS	75
IX. HOW THE IDEAL IS MADE REAL	84
X. THE MEANING OF CHRIST'S DEATH	92
XI. THE NATURE OF FAITH AND ITS RELATION TO SALVATION	101
XII. WHAT MUST WE BELIEVE?	109
XIII. THE HOLY SPIRIT	117
XIV. CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE, OR GOD IN US	125
XV. THE CHURCH	133
XVI. THE LITERATURE OF THE NEW TESTAMENT	140
XVII. IS REVELATION CONTINUOUS?	150
XVIII. CHRISTIANITY VINDICATED BY HISTORY	158

Contents

XVII.	IS REVELATION CONTINUOUS? . . .	150
XVIII.	CHRISTIANITY VINDICATED BY HISTORY	158

PART II

SOME OBSTACLES TO FAITH

I.	OBJECTIONS CLASSIFIED . . .	167
II.	ORIGIN OF MORAL EVIL . . .	170
III.	ELECTION	174
IV.	SIN, SALVATION, RETRIBUTION . . .	180
V.	SCIENCE AND REVELATION . . .	187
VI.	REVELATION PROGRESSIVE . . .	194
VII.	ABUSE OF AUTHORITY IN RELIGION . .	201
VIII.	CONVERSION—THE OLD DOCTRINE AND THE NEW LIGHT	209
IX.	A DIVIDED CHURCH	217
X.	MORAL DELINQUENCIES	224
XI.	THE SLOW PROGRESS OF THE KING- DOM OF GOD	232
XII.	THE CREED OF UNBELIEF	239

INTRODUCTION

I CAN NOT agree with those who characterize the present age as an age of doubt. This undeserved reputation is the result, let us think, of the tendency to investigate old beliefs, old forms of doctrine, old systems of philosophy, old theories of economics, and whatever else the present generation has inherited from those which have preceded it. But this sort of doubt, which desires to know the foundations on which things rest, and which seeks to verify the doctrines, traditions and philosophies which have come down to us, is entirely consistent with faith in God and His well-authenticated revelations. Such doubt is ever the forerunner of a larger and truer faith. It may be doubted if any previous age of the world has possessed more intelligent, well-grounded faith in the invisible God and in the eternal verities than the age in which we live. It is the author's belief that the present trend of thought and of feeling is toward faith and religion, rather than toward infidelity and irreligion.

Nevertheless, while saying this much in vindication of the people who inhabit the world

Helps to Faith

to-day, it is true beyond question that the faith of many is weak and ill-supported, and that some have made shipwreck of their faith through the defilement of their consciences and through neglect of those things which strengthen belief in God and in invisible realities. For some time the author has cherished the plan, when opportunity would offer, to prepare a brief work with the view of strengthening the faith of the weak and of helping those who are honestly seeking for an intelligent basis upon which to build faith. This he hopes to do in two ways: First, by a restatement of some of those fundamental things on which faith rests, or by which it grows; and second, by seeking to remove some obstacles out of the way which hinder faith. The latter is scarcely less important than the former, because of the tendency of the popular mind to confuse the theories and traditions of men which have become attached to Christianity in its passage through the centuries as barnacles cleave to the keel of a vessel, with the facts, truths and principles which enter vitally into the kingdom of God.

So much as to method. The motive which lies behind this effort is the desire to contribute, if only in some small degree, to the

Introduction

building up of a stronger and more intelligent faith in God, as He is revealed in Jesus Christ, and His spiritual reign among men. The most valuable possession a rational soul can have is a simple yet strong and robust faith that brings one into communion with God and that holds him to a life of loyal service to God and His fellowmen through all the temptations, vain philosophies and modern vagaries "of science, falsely so-called." Such a faith brings its possessor into the enjoyment of a spiritual inheritance of which neither the vicissitudes of life nor death itself can deprive him. It is the light by which the believer walks in the dark days when earthly helps have failed him. It is an invisible chain that binds his soul to the throne of God and holds it secure amid all the storms and tempests which may beat upon it. It is the secret of strength in our weakness, of joy in our sorrows, of hope in our despair, of triumph even in our defeats.

It is clear from what is stated above, that by the term *faith* is meant, not a set or formula of abstract doctrines, but the soul's spiritual vision—the power that apprehends the invisible. There is in every normal, rational human being what may be called the *faith-*

Helps to Faith

faculty. This only needs sincerity and purity of heart, the hungering and thirsting after righteousness, the necessary instruction in the things of the kingdom of God, to enable it to perceive spiritual realities, to apprehend truth, to lay hold of it with avidity, to recognize the reality of God and of His will as the supreme law of the universe and as the highest motive to righteous living. This faculty, like every other power of the soul, needs cultivation, needs something, in other words, on which to feed in order that it may grow and become the controlling force in all our choices and actions.

While it is the duty of religious teachers to cultivate faith in the people, it is no less the duty of every man to seek to increase his faith by all the means within his power so that he may be what God would have him to be, and achieve what it is possible for the soul to achieve that lives and labors under the "power of the world to come." Who of us may not say, with one of old, "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief!" To Him must we look for that increase of faith which the tasks and trials of the Church demand to-day, and His guidance is humbly invoked in presenting to the public these "Helps to Faith."

PART I

Some Facts on which Faith Rests

I

TESTIMONY OF THE RELIGIOUS INSTINCTS

WHEN we would examine the bottom facts of religious faith, we must deal with the foundational fact of human nature. Both the need and the capacity for faith in an invisible God grow out of the fact that man was created in the image of God—a rational, moral and self-determining being. But, omitting for the present the origin of man, or the source of his capacities, we are to deal first of all with human nature as we find it—its capacities, its aspirations, its longings, its needs. About these there can be little room for differences of opinion, and we are now seeking basal and accepted facts for the ground of our argument.

Taking man as we find him, what is he? The most obvious fact, perhaps, is that he possesses a body with certain simple but pressing needs which clamor for attention.* But these material needs having been met and

* Instead of saying, "Man has a soul," it is truer to fact to say that man *is* a soul, and has a body. The soul or spirit is not the thing possessed, but is itself the possessor.

Helps to Faith

satisfied, there are still other and higher needs which manifest themselves and require satisfaction. The rational nature asserts itself by asking questions, first, perhaps, concerning its material environment, and how this may be used to meet the needs of the body. It soon rises, however, to higher themes, and asks whence man came, why he came, and whither he is going. The fact that man raises such questions differentiates him at once from all lower orders of being. The highest animals below man are not capable of inquiring into their origin, nature and destiny. This capacity in man furnishes a new basis of classification, and separates him by a wide chasm from all lower forms of life.

As this reasoning and questioning being continues his investigations, he perceives within himself a higher capacity than that of mere reasoning. He is conscious of a desire to worship. He is, by the very law of his being and by the constitution of his moral nature, religious. Food for the body and knowledge for the mind do not satisfy the insatiable longings of the heart. There is an instinct, if we may not call it knowledge, of the infinite and of the eternal. He becomes dimly conscious of

Testimony of the Religious Instincts

his obligations to a being or beings superior to himself, to whom he owes homage and worship. This religious instinct has found expression in some form in every tribe or people that has made any progress out of mere animalism. If there be an apparent exception to this general rule, it is because, in all probability, we have not yet fully understood the tribe or nation which is supposed to constitute the exception. At any rate, the religious nature is sufficiently universal to leave no doubt that it enters into, and constitutes an essential part of, our common human nature. It has been a fundamental mistake of the materialistic class of scientists, of those sometimes denominated *naturalists*, that they have failed to make any account of man's religious nature in the application of the inductive method of reasoning. Surely it must be a very imperfect induction of facts that ignores the most significant and characteristic facts of human nature! Small wonder that wrong conclusions have been reached concerning man and his relations to the invisible when there have been left out of the premises such patent and commanding facts as man's moral nature and religious instincts!

One of the changes which have come over

Helps to Faith

modern scientific and philosophical thought is the clearer and more universal recognition of the essential place which religion holds in man's nature. This has resulted from a more careful and critical study of man, from a truer and profounder psychology, and from a truer application of the inductive method of reasoning which must take note of all the facts and make room for these facts in its theories. There is practical unanimity among the world's thinkers to-day as to the reality and normality of man's religious nature, and therefore as to the necessity of religion in order to man's complete and normal development. There is absolutely no clue to man's history in the past, and no explanation of the spiritual phenomena associated with human history, without the recognition of this basal fact, that man is by nature and endowment a worshiping being. This at least is the conclusion to which the best thought of modern times has led us. We may accept it, therefore, as a secure basis from which to reason.

But if the religious nature in man be normal, organic, whence came it? Why should man possess a nature that leads him to reverence and worship a superior being if no such being

Testimony of the Religious Instincts

exists? It avails nothing to attribute man's origin to Force, and spell it with a capital. Man does not worship blind material force. It is only the intelligence, the thought, the will, in a word, the personality, that lies behind force that calls out man's homage and worship. The irresistible conclusion is that if religion be normal and the crowning feature of man's nature, then there is a Being who so created him, and who is worthy of his love, of his worship and of his obedience. And this is true whether we accept the evolutionary method of creation or the theory of a direct and immediate creation, for in either case there must be a Creator, and the facts of human nature, as we have indicated them, find their only explanation in a Creator who possesses in an infinite degree those qualities and faculties which we find germinal in man. He is not to be reasoned with who would argue that man's rational, moral and religious nature, his splendid idealism, his lofty aspirations and longings after the infinite, sprang from the fortuitous combination of atoms, and the accidental operation of blind material forces. The fact of human nature, as we see it and know it, is proof irrefutable of the existence of an All-wise and All-gracious

Helps to Faith

Being who is the Author of man, and who is guiding his development toward some far-off, majestic consummation.

If "the heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament showeth His handiwork," even more so does the rational and moral nature of man declare His glory and power. "Two things," says Kant, "fill me with awe; the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me." The better we understand the significance of this moral law within us, this higher nature, crying out for satisfaction which the world cannot give, the more assuredly will we understand that He who gave us that moral nature is the Creator and Law-giver of the universe—the Being worthy of our sincerest worship—who made us for Himself and who alone can satisfy the soul's deepest and highest needs.

It may be said that, while it is true beyond reasonable doubt that the testimony of man's intellectual nature to the existence of intelligence in the material world, does prove the existence of an Infinite Mind in the universe, yet there is less satisfactory proof that this Mind is a personality who is good and gracious, and worthy of man's love and worship.

But this conclusion fails to give full value to

Testimony of the Religious Instincts

the witness which man's religious instincts bear to the existence of a being worthy of our worship. "Religion as we have seen, is natural to man, and practically universal. It does not wait for proof of the existence of God; it springs up from an intuitive sense of unseen realities. Man looks upward and prays; he thus bears testimony to his sense of dependence and obligation; he thus recognizes a power and an authority above him; and he thus assumes that there is some one to whom his prayer may properly be addressed. Religion may be crude and superstitious, and the object of worship unknown and misjudged; but the universal impulse and practice declare that religion belongs to the nature of man, and that there is a Being above man for him to worship. The religious constitution of man asserts that there is some Being whom man may worthily address in prayer.

"We instinctively trust our intellectual powers, and experience proves that we are safe in doing so, for we and the world are made upon one method. Are we equally safe in trusting the testimony of this religious intuition? Certainly we are, if we live in an honest world. Religious worship, obedience, and

Helps to Faith

aspiration are as normal to man as sensation or reasoning. Any one of these powers may be misinformed or misdirected, yet they are genuine powers of man. Sense and reason are normally trustworthy, and so, we instinctively affirm, is the impulse to aspire, obey and worship in the presence of a higher Power. . . . In a world of reality every power has its counterpart,—the eye has light, the reason has truth, and the religious nature has God. If the religious nature in man has no real being corresponding to it, no one who is worthy of the adoration and trustful obedience that man is moved to give to One above him, then we can only say that man was born with his highest nature looking out into empty space. He was endowed with noble powers that can only mislead and disappoint him; and thus he comes into being possessed of a nature that is essentially false. Moreover, it is the highest in him that is false. But if human nature is false in its highest region,—false by being made so in its very constitution—then we cannot be sure that it is true in any department of its activity. If we say that man's highest nature naturally deceives him, we resign all right to rely upon our nature or the validity of our powers, and

Testimony of the Religious Instincts

confidence in our mental processes is at an end. We are compelled to trust our own powers just as truly in the religious realm as in the physical or the intellectual. If we are not safe in this, we are sure of nothing; and the powers that we are compelled to trust affirm that there is One above us who is worthy of our love and adoration.”*

That the testimony of our religious nature is abundantly confirmed by the experience of the best and most advanced people of the world will appear in subsequent chapters. It has been made sufficiently clear, so far, that if we are to rely on the testimony of our religious nature, which is man's highest nature, we must conclude that there is a God answering to the demands of this nature, who is worthy of our worship and our service.

*Clarke's "Outline of Christian Theology," pp. 118-120.

II

THE DISHARMONY IN MAN'S NATURE

WE have already seen that man's religious nature is a fact that must be reckoned with in any true estimate of man and of his needs. We have seen, too, that the meaning of this fact of man's moral and religious nature is that there is something which answers to this religious need, and that this something can be nothing else than the Being who created man with these powers and capacities, and who possesses in an infinite degree those qualities and attributes which we find germinal in man. Since man possesses a mental, moral and volitional nature, thereby making him a personality, we are forced to the conclusion that the Being who gave man this endowment is also a person, and a person of such power and character as to make him a supreme object of man's worship.

We come now to deal with another fact of human nature which all have observed, and which all must admit to be a fact. We refer to the disharmony which exists in our human nature as we find it to-day. When each one

The Disharmony in Man's Nature

of us looks closely into his own nature, he observes two opposing tendencies. On the one hand he is conscious of possessing lofty aspirations, a sense of approval of that which is right and pure and good, and of a desire to possess those qualities which his mind approves. On the other hand he perceives that there is another law in his members which tends to thwart his higher aims and desires, and to pull him downward. He finds that his appetites and passions, his fleshly lusts and longings, are at war with the other part of his nature which prompts him to higher and better things. We need no Bible, nor special revelation from God, nor prophet, nor priest, nor preacher, to make us aware of the reality of this conflict between these antagonistic elements in our nature. It is a matter of daily experience with us. One of the greatest characters of history, in describing this conflict within himself, has said: "For the good which I would I do not; but the evil which I would not, that I practice. . . . I find then the law, that, to me who would do good, evil is present. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: but I see a different law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity under

Helps to Faith

the law of sin which is in my members." This was not only the experience of Paul before his conversion, but it has been to a greater or less extent the experience of every man.

We have all observed this fact and felt its influence in our lives; but have we all inquired the significance of this fact, and sought to understand its meaning? What does it mean? It means that, in the first place, man is not all fleshly and material, as he would seem to be, at first, to the eye of sense. It means that in addition to his physical nature and organization, he is endowed with a higher nature which asserts its rights and protests against living the mere fleshly or material life. If this were not so, there would be no conflict. There is no evidence that the animals experience any such discord in their nature. Man has something more than mere intelligence to differentiate him from the lower orders of beings. He has a spiritual hunger which the material world cannot satisfy. This is another fact of human experience. Men may drown this spiritual hunger in the sea of sensual enjoyment, for a time, so that its cravings may be unheeded, but there come moments in which it will assert itself with tremendous power, and reveal to

The Disharmony in Man's Nature

man his incompleteness, his imperfections, his need of something higher and more enduring than wealth, or pleasure or worldly honor.

It is evidence of the wonderful law of love that encompasses the world, that even man's sin is made to bear witness to the reality of God, and to His righteous character. Who of us has not known what it is to cower under the lash of an outraged conscience when we have knowingly violated God's law? But what was that verdict of conscience against us but God's voice, speaking through our moral nature and condemning us? As long, therefore, as we feel self-condemned for our wrong actions we may know that God has not abandoned us, but is still calling us to repentance. This very conflict in our nature is proof of the reality of God and of man's moral nature.

Another meaning of this fact of man's spiritual unrest is, that man, being made in God's image, can find rest and satisfaction only as he is brought into harmony with his Maker. This is a deduction from human experience, no less than it is a matter of revelation. Experience and observation teach that those who conform to the laws of their higher nature, living soberly, righteously and godly, resisting the sollicita-

Helps to Faith

tions of their lower natures to do evil, are those who find peace and spiritual rest. The man of the world as well as the Christian can take cognizance of this fact. Indeed he knows from his own experience that when he has resisted the evil in his own nature and followed the promptings of his conscience, he has been more at peace within himself than when he has resisted his higher nature and followed the leadings of his baser passions. If he would allow this experience to guide him to its logical result, it would lead him to obedience to God, in all things.

But there is still another meaning to this fact of the conflict which exists in human nature which has an important bearing on the line of thought which we are following. It is a fact—and let it be noted that we are dealing now with the facts of human consciousness and human experience—that finds abundant corroboration in the history of each individual, that this conflict between the higher and the lower nature ends in the defeat of the higher, and the triumph of the lower, unless there be some sort of spiritual reinforcement or help given to man's higher nature. Account for it as we may, whether by the theory that the spirit is

The Disharmony in Man's Nature

clothed here with a fleshly body, and the bodily appetites and passions are more urgent and clamorous than the cravings of the spirit, or on the theory of evolution, that man is gradually passing from the animal life into a higher type of being, and has not yet escaped the thralldom of his animalism, or on the theory of the "fall of man" and his consequent moral depravity, the fact itself remains undisputed and indisputable, that man left to himself without help from above remains under the dominion of his lower nature, and does not rise into the freedom of the spirit, nor attain to the highest and noblest type of character.

No fact recorded in biblical history ought to commend itself more readily to our acceptance than that of the transgression of our first parents and the consequences of that sin. Childhood is an Eden in which we have all dwelt. The memory of its sweet innocence and trustfulness lingers with us as a fragrance wafted to us from some garden of paradise. But we can most of us recall a time when we consciously disobeyed and did that which we knew to be wrong. We remember, too, the stings of conscience, and how we were exiled, for a time at least, from the delights of that beautiful Eden

Helps to Faith

that lies back there in the early morning of our childhood. But whatever may be our view of the origin of sin, its presence in our lives as a disquieting, peace-destroying, disharmonizing influence, is a most palpable and painful fact. The universality of this disharmony is proof, too, of the solidarity of the race, and that we are sharers in a common lot, and need a common remedy.

The highest meaning, then, of this disharmony between our lower and higher natures is that God, or the Being who placed us here in the flesh and gave us these higher aspirations, must have made provision for the needs of this higher nature in order that it may ultimately triumph over the lower, and so bring man to the realization of the destiny for which he was created. We cannot conceive that a Being whose character is wise and beneficent, and who created man with such possibilities of moral and spiritual development, would place him here in the world under conditions which would involve the defeat of the very aim he had in view in his creation. This would violate both His wisdom and His goodness. We are led, therefore, by the very meaning of the facts of human nature, as we see them and know

The Disharmony in Man's Nature

them in our own lives and in the lives of those about us and from the records of human history, to the conclusion that the Being who created man and placed him here in the world, has made provision for his redemption from the power of sin, and also, for the continuity of man's existence beyond the experience which men call death, to the fulfillment of his highest hopes and aspirations.

In future chapters let us seek to discover what provision has been made for man's rescue from the power of sin and death, and whether such provision commends itself to man's reason and faith as worthy of God, and wisely adapted to human needs.

III

GOD'S SELF-REVELATION

OUR reasoning, so far, has brought us to the conclusion that the Being who made man and who gave him his religious nature, which the earth and all its material blessings cannot satisfy, would make provision for such nature in a religion which would satisfy its deepest needs and highest aspirations. We are thus brought face to face with the question whether such a religion has been given to man, and if so, what is its character?

If the Being who created man is both wise and good to an infinite degree, as the facts which we have examined have led us to believe, would He not inevitably seek to disclose Himself to man? Is it not inevitable that any religion which would satisfy the higher nature of man created in the image of God must come along the line of the knowledge of God's character and will? This seems self-evident. Religion has to do with man's relations to God and the duties which grow out of these relations. How can these be understood without a

God's Self-Revelation

knowledge of God's will and character? It follows, then, that God would begin a process of self-revelation, making known His being and character just as fast as man would be able to receive these revelations. To conclude otherwise would be to impute to the Creator a desire and purpose to keep men in ignorance of the most vital facts and truths in the universe, and this would be, of course, in violation of the conclusions we have already reached concerning His character and His purpose in creating man. What we should look for, then, from a priori reasoning, would be the evidences of such revelation. Where and how has God revealed Himself to man? His wisdom and Godhood are manifest in the material universe which He has created. This is not sufficient of itself, however, to acquaint man with the character of God and with His will concerning us. There are those who limit God's revelation to the visible works of His hand; but such an idea does not meet the demands of the case, as we have seen from the facts of human nature. It does not meet man's deepest needs. Where are we to look for any additional revelation?

Before answering this question, let us ask,

Helps to Faith

To whom would God be most likely to give the fullest and clearest revelation of Himself? According to the principle already stated, it would be to those most capable of receiving the knowledge which He would impart. If we should find, therefore, in the ancient records of any particular people or nation, a revelation of God's character and will far superior, in its moral teaching and in its conception of the divine Being, to that given in the records or religions of other ancient peoples, we should not conclude that God is a respecter of persons and has chosen to lift up one nation and leave all the rest in ignorance. Since all men, everywhere, have the same religious needs, and are equally the creatures of His hand, we cannot doubt that any revelation which He would make through any person or nation would be designed for the benefit of all men of all nations. If, however, He found one people more open to receive religious instruction, or a knowledge of the true God, than others, He would naturally reveal Himself to those in a larger measure than to others, and make them the custodians of His word for the benefit of all the rest. Such a course would be in entire harmony with both His wisdom and His goodness, and would

God's Self-Revelation

be carrying out His plan to bring all men to the knowledge of Himself and of His will.

What we have seen to be the natural and reasonable procedure on the part of God in His self-revelation to men, so far as our finite judgments are able to understand such high matters, we find to be the very course which God has pursued. In the ancient records of the Hebrew race, which have come down to us, there is contained an account of the creation of the heavens and the earth, and all the lower forms of life, of man and the early history of the race, and a number of theophanies, or divine self-manifestations, together with moral precepts, religious rites, and prophetic utterances concerning God's will, man's duty and the future progress of God's purposes on the earth, which, in the lofty conception of God's character—His unity, His righteousness and holiness and His compassion toward men—and in the purity of its ethical teaching and in its far-reaching forecast of the purposes of God, transcends by infinity all the other religious books of antiquity found among the various tribes and peoples of earth. This is no biased statement, true only as it appears from the point of view of a Christian believer, but is supported by a consensus

Helps to Faith

of the best moral sentiment of the world. We now know more about the ancient religions of the world than any other previous generation has known. The buried past has been largely disinterred, and modern scholarship has been able to decipher the ancient hieroglyphics of the remote past, and read the religious conceptions and rites of antique nations which were feeling after God, in their blindness, if haply they might find Him. We are able, therefore, to make a comparison between the religion contained in the records of the Hebrew race and the ethnic religions and the idolatrous systems of the long past, as never before. The result of this study of comparative religions is, that the book which we call the Old Testament contains a unique revelation of God's character and will, indicating that He had chosen the Hebrew people because of their special fitness to receive and to be the custodians of His revelations to the race. In its conception of the oneness of God, and of His holiness, of man's origin and nature, and of his duty to God and his fellowmen; in the noble characters portrayed through whom God speaks to the world, and in the high optimistic notes concerning the future of the race, which it con-

God's Self-Revelation

tinually sounds, it bears indisputable evidence of the divine inbreathing by which its writers were enabled to understand God and His way with men. For the present, however, the fact of inspiration is not insisted on, but only the vast superiority of the revelations contained in the Old Testament to all other previous or contemporaneous religious systems.

But important and sublime as these revelations of God in the Old Testament are, and superior as they are admitted to be to the religious ideas found in any other nation, they do not meet fully the needs of the human soul. They are educative, illuminative, and prophetic of something better and higher. None saw more clearly the imperfections of past revelations than the Hebrew prophets themselves. Standing on the mountain-top of their prophetic office, they foretold a fuller and more perfect revelation. What these prophecies are the inquiring reader may find for himself by consulting the Old Testament Scriptures. Concerning the method, nature and significance of this last revelation, we shall speak more fully in later chapters. It has been our purpose, thus far, beginning with the undisputed facts of human nature, to bring the inquiring soul by

Helps to Faith

necessary inferences and conclusions from these facts, face to face with God's supreme revelation to men. With the vast meaning of that revelation, we are now to deal.

IV

JESUS AS A REVELATION OF GOD

NO ONE would deny that if it were God's purpose to disclose Himself to men, He would not be satisfied with less than a perfect revelation. Anything less than the best possible revelation of His character would not be consistent with His purpose to make Himself known, nor with what we know of His works in nature and in man. But the best possible revelation is not by words, which at best are imperfect vehicles of thought. When truth comes to man clothed in a living personality, it possesses a clearness, a convincing power, a moral grandeur, a power to command assent, which no verbal message can convey. Besides, it was not simply abstract truth that God wished to make known to men, but His character, and this could be portrayed in no other way so effectively as through a living, perfect personality embodying the essential attributes of Deity.

Let us take, for instance, the element of love which we are led to believe is the ruling motive

Helps to Faith

of God's character. We may be sure that His chief concern, then, would be to convince men that His attitude toward them is that of love and good will. How can this fact be convincingly impressed upon the world, except in some lofty act of sublime self-sacrifice on the part of God for mankind? The love that is conveyed by words, merely, is a spurious article. Here is one of the great underlying reasons for the incarnation—for the Word's becoming flesh and dwelling among men. The moral necessity for the incarnation affords the highest grounds of its reasonableness and credibility as an historic fact. That such necessity existed is as certain as that it was necessary for man to be convinced of God's love in order that he might, in return, love and obey Him. The highest proof of God's love was not given until it could be stated as a fact that "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believeth on Him might not perish but have everlasting life."

These considerations prepare us for considering the most remarkable phenomenon of history, the personality of Jesus of Nazareth. He appeared, according to the scriptural statement, "in the fullness of time." It was at the con-

Jesus as a Revelation of God

fluence of three great civilizations—the Greek, Roman and Hebrew,—that this unique character appeared as a Teacher of man. These three civilizations had done their best, and the race was sinking steadily deeper in the mire of its own degeneracy. Greece had offered her sculpture and her literature, Rome her vast empire and world-wide government, and the Hebrew race had contributed a marvelous history and a moral law unequaled in the world's religions; and yet in spite of these forces the world was going steadily from bad to worse. Surely the time was ripe for the appearance of that Teacher of whom Moses and the prophets had spoken, who would introduce into life a diviner power than it had ever known before. At any rate there stands the fact of Jesus of Nazareth to be accounted for. It is an undisputed fact. Not only is the fact of Jesus Himself outside the realm of dispute or uncertainty, but His unique character, also, is attested by every writer, whether he be skeptic or believer, who has ever thoughtfully considered it. In seeking for a solid basis of fact on which to build a superstructure of faith, we are justified in calling attention to this supreme fact of history, and in asking its meaning and significance.

Helps to Faith

No one has a right to call himself a skeptic or an infidel who has not given due consideration to this fact of Jesus and its meaning. Nor can the force of this fact be evaded by falling back on that fashionable form of modern skepticism known as agnosticism, which claims that nothing certain can be known about God or religion. Man cannot say of this fact, as the late G. H. Lewes in his *History of Philosophy* said of religion in general, "It confesses its inability to furnish knowledge with any available data." Jesus Himself deprived agnosticism of any excuse for such a plea, when He called attention to His own personality as the fundamental fact of religion. As a recent writer has said, "To every such one—be his agnosticism intellectually self-satisfied, sensually self-indulgent, or neither of these but only sad—comes the great Master of the soul with His revolutionary restatement of the problem of religion. What He says, in effect, is this: You say you cannot answer the question of God; it is beyond your ken. Well, here is the way in which to approach this question, What is your attitude towards Me? Now, whatever else this question may be, it is at least this—it is answerable. Your agnosticism

Jesus as a Revelation of God

cannot apply here. If the being of God is beyond your ken, the fact of Christ is not. He is a fact of history, cognizable as any other phenomenon. And your mental and moral conclusions on this answerable question are the true beginnings of an answer to the apparently inscrutable problem of religion.”*

This is what Jesus accomplished for Christianity when He asked His disciples, “Whom say ye that I am?” and in answer to the question declared His purpose to build His Church, in other words, to base His religion, on the truth thus confessed concerning His own personality. This at once places the religion of Jesus in the realm of things knowable, and shows the injustice of Mr. Lewes in dismissing religion from the realm of verifiable knowledge, because, as quoted above, “It confesses its inability to furnish knowledge with any available data.” It makes no such confession. “Jesus furnished His followers with the most

*“The Fact of Christ,” page 22. Since beginning this work, our attention has been called to this work of P. Carnegie Simpson, M. A., Minister of Renfield, Glasgow. The work follows very much the same line of thought which we had mapped out, except that while it begins with the fact of Christ we have begun with the fact of human nature, in order to reach an indisputable basis. We shall have occasion to refer to this work frequently, perhaps, in future chapters.

Helps to Faith

patent and accessible of data—the person standing before them. The data of His religion were and are a positive fact. What are the data? Unverifiable sentiments or ideas in the inscrutable region of faith? Not so. ‘Whom say ye that I am?’ ‘What think ye of Christ?’ ‘I am the truth.’ ‘Come unto Me.’ Here are the data of Christianity. They are in an historical person, a fact as available as any other fact. Jesus drove agnosticism into the open when He declared that the data of religion are in the fact of Christ.’’* This is in entire harmony with the method of Jesus throughout the four gospels, and it is absolutely unique. No other religious teacher ever emphasized his own personality above the truths he declared, and made man’s destiny to turn upon their attitude to himself, rather than upon the doctrine which he taught. How are we to account for this unique fact, that the meekest man of all history should have made His whole religion turn upon the truth concerning Himself rather than upon the abstract truthfulness of the message He conveyed?

The fact is very readily explained on the hypothesis already mentioned, that God in the

*“The Fact of Christ,” p. 23.

Jesus as a Revelation of God

process of His self-disclosure found it necessary to reveal His character and purpose to men through a perfect personality. If Jesus be that personality, and if He came to be a revealer of God and of true religion to men, would it not follow that His first and chief concern would be to establish Himself in the confidence of men as the accredited messenger of God, even the Son of God, who was authorized to speak for God on the most vital concerns of human life? This fact once established, His claim once accredited, His divine mission understood and accepted, the way is then open for Him to fulfill His mission as the Teacher and Savior of mankind. This unique method of Jesus, therefore, finds its only explanation in His unique personality, as the Son of God, and in His unique mission as the revealer of God to men. It explains, too, how that Jesus, the anointed of God, is Himself the object of Christian faith, since believing on Him we accept as truth all His teaching.

It would seem to follow, then, according to this method of Jesus, who made the great question of His religion, not "What think ye of God?" or "What think ye of the Ten Commandments?" but "What think ye of Christ?"

Helps to Faith

that, from this one supreme fact may be deduced the whole Christian religion. The phrase, "On this rock I will build My Church," cannot mean less than this. If this be a true inference, then the most prevailing form of modern skepticism, namely agnosticism, is without foundation, unless it can be shown that the phenomenon of Jesus throws no light upon the character and will of God, and furnishes no data which bring religion within the sphere of verifiable knowledge. It is the clear implication of Jesus's teaching concerning Himself, that the fact which His personality and character present to man, furnishes the data for learning of God and of true religion. In our further study of this fact, we shall have occasion to see both the truth of this implication and the wisdom of His unique method in presenting His own personality as the crucial point in religion.

V

GIVEN CHRIST, CHRISTIANITY FOLLOWS

THIS, we found, was the necessary implication from the statement of Jesus to His disciples on the coast of Cæsarea Philippi. He declared his purpose to build His Church, which cannot mean less than to found his religion, on the fact of His unique personality. The question we are now led to consider, is, How does the fact of Jesus yield us the data for Christianity? This will depend very largely upon what we understand to be involved in the fact of Christ. To that we must first give attention.

That Jesus was the greatest man of all history is universally admitted among thinking men. The truth is, it seems to offend our sense of propriety to compare Him with other men. As a recent writer has said, "Talk about Alexander the Great and Charles the Great and Napoleon the Great, if you will. Jesus was . . . incomparably greater than any of these; yet, who would speak of Jesus the Great? Jesus is apart. He is not the Great, He is the Only. He is simply Jesus. Nothing could add to

Helps to Faith

that.”* If greatness be measured by the influence one exerts, or by the power to achieve great things, then who among the sons of men will compare with Jesus? Mr. Lecky, in his “History of European Morals,” declares that the “three short years” of the ministry of Jesus have “done more to regenerate and to soften mankind than all the disquisitions of philosophers and all the exhortations of moralists.” No one competent to judge will call this an extravagant statement, and yet it puts Jesus, who is called Christ, in a class by Himself.

When we come to look closely into the character of Jesus, to find out the elements of His greatness, we are struck at once with His intellectual superiority. He discussed continually, with friends and foes, the deepest problems connected with human life and destiny. He taught men concerning God and the nature of religion, and the obligations growing out of our human relationships. He was continually beset by those who were anxious to betray Him into some rash utterance or unwise declaration of principle or of policy. But His wisdom was a constant surprise alike

*“The Fact of Christ,” p. 44. We are indebted to this work for several suggestions in this article.

Given Christ, Christianity Follows

to His enemies and His friends. Officers who were sent to arrest Him came back and reported, "Never man spake like this man." Sadducees, Pharisees, Herodians, Jewish rabbis and learned lawyers, all were silenced by His answers to their questions. This, in itself, was remarkable, but when we add to it the truth that nineteen centuries of the world's progress has not impeached His wisdom, or disclosed any fault in His teaching, the fact becomes marvelous indeed. There is not the slightest indication that the world will ever outgrow the sublime teaching of the Sermon on the Mount, or any other part of His doctrine relating to man's duties to God and to his fellowmen. Think of the significance of that fact—Jesus the infallible Teacher in the realm of religion and morals.

But let us put alongside the intellectual superiority of Jesus His moral perfection—His sinlessness. One who heard all the accusations which His enemies could bring against Him before his tribunal, said, "I find no fault in Him." This is the verdict of His own time and of all subsequent ages. His challenge to His enemies, "Who of you convicteth Me of sin?" still remains unanswered. All the light

Helps to Faith

which has been gathered from the progress in human morals has been turned on His life and character to discover in it, if possible, some flaw, but without success. He remains the solitary exception among all the millions of our race in this respect. The best men of the world have most realized their moral imperfections, but Jesus never betrayed the slightest consciousness of His own sin or shortcoming. His moral experience was unique. He maintained throughout His life a perfect consciousness of oneness with the Father. Possessing the keenest insight into the motives of the heart, He was yet free from any consciousness of guilt. He emphasized the duty of repentance on the part of all men, yet He never repented. It is this supreme fact in the life of Jesus that makes men stand in awe of Him and kneel before Him in worship. No wonder Charles Lamb once said to a company of friends, "If Shakespeare were to come into this room we should all rise up to meet him, but if that person [referring to Christ] was to come into it, we should all fall down and try to kiss the hem of His garment."

Not only is it true that Jesus was pure and sinless, but He offered Himself to men as one

Given Christ, Christianity Follows

whose mission it was to supply all their needs. Sinless Himself, He invited all sinners to come to Him for pardon. Such passages as, "If any man thirst, let him come unto Me and drink;" "I am the bread of life;" "I am the vine, ye are the branches;" "Come unto Me, all ye that are heavy laden, and I will give you rest," show that He regarded Himself as the supplier of others' needs. "They reveal one who not only is Himself without moral distress, but can aid all distress. Others are lost sheep; He is not only not lost, but is the shepherd. Others are sick; He is not only in health, but is the physician. Others' lives are forfeit; His is not only His own, but is the ransom. Others—all others—are sinners; He not only is not a sinner, but is a Savior."* Consider the infinite greatness of soul and the infinite compassion of heart, which would lead one to open wide His arms for all the sorrowful, sinful, broken-hearted, defeated and weary ones of earth, and invite them to come to Him for comfort, for cleansing, for victory and for rest. Think of the meaning of this stupendous fact in its bearing on the fact of Christ and of His religion. Let it be understood, too, that these significant

*The Fact of Christ, p. 46.

Helps to Faith

facts which we have stated "are not exaggerated dogmas of orthodoxy. They are conclusions of the most modern criticism."

If anything needs to be added to the facts already mentioned concerning Christ to show that His unique personality contains within it the essential data of Christianity, it is this—that He claimed to be the Son of God, the Savior of sinners, the Christ foretold by prophecy, the Founder of a universal religion, the King of the kingdom of God, and the future Judge of all men. The meekest of all men, and clothed with humility as with a garment, He yet claimed that all authority both in heaven and in earth had been given unto Him, and that the salvation of men depended upon their attitude toward Him.

That He wrought many mighty works, attesting His divine power and mission, was admitted even by His enemies during His earthly ministry. But passing that fact by, let us approach at once the supreme fact, that, having been put to death by His enemies He appeared again to His disciples on the third day after His burial, and made Himself known to them during a period of forty days by many "infallible proofs." No student of the life of

Given Christ, Christianity Follows

Jesus, to-day, seriously questions the fact of His resurrection. Not only have we the testimony of His disciples to the fact, who sealed their testimony with their blood, but we have, what is even more convincing, the establishment of His Church immediately following His resurrection, and its marvelous triumphs among the people of that generation and in subsequent ages. No one has ever offered any possible explanation of the rise and progress of Christianity without the fact of the resurrection of Jesus and the living Christ. Given that fact, not only is Christianity accounted for but human history, since that date, becomes intelligible, and without it would be an enigma.

What, then, have we found to be involved in the fact of Christ? A sublime personality, who, in intellectual power and in His moral perfection, stands alone and admits of no classification with other men. We have found One who is not only sinless Himself, but who claimed to be the Savior of sinners; who was not only complete within Himself, but who proposed to make whole the sin-wounded and maimed ones of earth, to comfort all the sorrowful, to heal the broken-hearted, and give rest to all the weary. This unique Person claimed to

Helps to Faith

be the Son of God, to hold the sovereign power over men's destiny, and, having been put to death, He rose again from the dead in proof of these marvelous claims. What shall an honest soul, standing in front of these great facts, do with them, and what can he learn from them? These are questions with which we have yet to deal.

VI

WHAT THEN SHALL I DO WITH JESUS?

IN closing the preceding chapter we raised two questions: What shall the honest soul, standing in front of these great facts concerning Christ, do with them? And, What can he learn from them? Let us deal with the first of these questions in this chapter. In the last analysis the question, What shall we do with the facts about Jesus? means, What shall we do with Jesus Himself who is called Christ? The inquiry may well assume the form of Pilate's question, and charged with vastly more meaning than the Roman governor put into it. In this personal form we are at last compelled to deal with the question.

It is impossible for any thoughtful, honest person to stop his investigations concerning Jesus with the ascertainment of the facts which we have already mentioned. He must, if he be true to his higher nature and true to the logic of these facts, inquire, what about them? To what conclusion do they lead, as respects Jesus Himself, and as respects the soul's relation to

Helps to Faith

Him? Do the facts permit us to conclude that this unique personality whose character is all that we can conceive God's character to be, whose power to redeem the world from sin is all that we can conceive God's power to be, whose claims on the faith and obedience of men are all that God's claims could possibly be, and whose offer of salvation to all the sinful and sorrowing ones of earth is as large and generous as God's offer could be, is anything less than deity Himself? If so, then we have this strange anomaly, that the very being whose life and character and power to save have given us our highest conception of God, is Himself unworthy of that name and rank! This is a logical *cul de sac* in which no clear thinker will allow himself to be caught. He must either explain to himself how these facts admit of a different interpretation than that we have suggested, namely, that in Jesus the Christ, we have the divine incarnation, or else he must bow before Him, and ask, as did the stricken persecutor of old, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?"

The former course, we have already tried to show, is clearly impossible. The undisputed facts in the history and character of Jesus, admit of no such explanation. A sinless being,

What then Shall I Do with Jesus?

living in conscious oneness with the Father, manifesting the attributes and claiming the prerogatives of Godhood, subordinating the laws of nature to His will, and triumphing over death, establishing a kingdom, which is triumphing over all other kingdoms, and marching down the centuries at the head of an increasing and conquering host, lifting empires off their hinges with His wounded hands, and guiding the course of human history, is not to be classed with men. He meets all our highest and worthiest conceptions of Godhood. The banks of the stream of ecclesiastical history for nineteen centuries are lined with the debris of broken, exploded and outgrown theories of Christology, which have tried to account for the divine Man of Nazareth on rationalistic principles. The very men who have framed these systems or theories have cast them aside as worthless. The supreme majesty and divine benignity of the face of the Galilean Prophet, as it is seen more clearly through the perspective of history and through the parting and vanishing mists of ecclesiastical tradition, are rendering obsolete these inadequate theories, and silencing the noisy tongues of glib and superficial infidel lecturers. Ingersoll and

Helps to Faith

Bradlaugh have no successors. Martineau and Channing, men of pious hearts and of eminent ability, were representatives of a type of a Unitarianism that is almost extinct. Every religious system that loses its grip on a divine Christ, soon loses its grip on humanity. It is the uplifted Christ, pouring out His sinless life for a sinful world, that is drawing all men unto Him.

Then we must come back to the other alternative. We must bow low before Him who claimed that "all men should honor the Son, even as they honor the Father," and offer Him the homage of our souls, and put ourselves under His direction as Savior and Lord. But no self-respecting man can do this to a man, not even to a *good* man. The very law of God forbids that he should do it. He who calls Jesus Lord, must go farther and say with Thomas, "my Lord and my God!" We need not greatly trouble ourselves if we are unable to accept any of the formulations of the trinitarian doctrine, or if we are unable to formulate a statement of the New Testament doctrine of the relations of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, for ourselves. There is no harm in our attempting to do so, if we do not seek to impose it on others,

What then Shall I Do with Jesus?

and it may serve to clarify our thinking. But no such requirement is made a condition of our salvation. What is required of us is that we accept Jesus in the capacity in which He offers Himself to men as the Christ, the Son of the living God, who only can reveal the Father, and who alone can save men from their sins, and from the power of death. This is the essential content of Christian faith. To establish His claims upon the faith and obedience of men, the four gospels were written. To this conclusion, then, are we brought by the facts of the gospel and by the events of Christian history.

May we, then, stop here by giving our adhesion to this New Testament creed, and feel that we have met the demands which these facts make upon us? Not so. "Why call ye me Lord and do not the things I command you?" No man can come into touch with Jesus Christ, through faith in Him, without feeling the pressure of moral obligation to obey His teaching and conform His life, as far as possible, to the divine ideal which is presented in Him. We may admire and even love other men, and go on living pretty much the same old life. But not so with Jesus Christ. He

Helps to Faith

raises moral issues with all those who come to know Him. His purity rebukes our impurity; His lofty ideals of life and duty impeach our low ideals; His oneness with God makes our separation from Him more apparent; His unselfish life reproves and condemns our self-centered lives; His love for us, even while we were yet sinners, softens and subdues our hearts; His grace invites us; His beauty of character charms us; His majesty awes us; His authority commands us. What shall we do with Jesus? There is but one thing we can do, without doing violence to reason, to conscience and to faith. We must say: "This is He of whom Moses and the prophets spoke. This is He for whom my religious instincts have cried out in their hunger for a satisfying knowledge of God and of duty. He is Lord of my conscience and my life. He meets the profoundest needs of my soul. He is the Savior I need, the Lord whom I must obey." Or, in the words of "the disciple whom Jesus loved," we are led to exclaim: "This is the true God, and eternal life."

If one fails to reach this solution of the question, "What shall I do with Jesus?" it is because he turns away from following the logic

What then Shall I Do with Jesus?

of the facts concerning Him, and refuses to be guided into the kind of life which He requires of men. Thousands do this, refusing to follow the plain leading of undisputed facts, and shutting their eyes to the conclusions to which these facts point, because they prefer darkness to light. Many of these then call themselves agnostics, claiming that there is no certain knowledge about God and eternal life! If Jesus had not come into the world these men might have had a cloak for their sins, but seeing they have closed their eyes, their ears and their minds to the knowledge which Jesus Christ came to impart concerning God and human duty and destiny, their condemnation will be all the greater. Christ came a light into the world that whosoever believeth on Him might not abide in darkness, but have the light of life. But if men will not walk in the light as it shines on their pathway in the face of Jesus Christ, then the light that is in them becomes darkness. And how great is that darkness! There is no increasing light for him who refuses to walk in the light that he has. There is no infidelity so common and so fatal in its moral results as disbelief in, and disloyalty to, the light which God has given us. Blessed

Helps to Faith

are they who open their eyes to this light
and walk in it, for these are they whose path
shall grow brighter, even unto the perfect day.

VII

LEARNING OF JESUS

THE facts in the life and character of Jesus, culminating in His resurrection from the dead, and His influence upon subsequent history and upon the whole collective life of man, have led us to accept Him as the Son of God, as the incarnation of deity and as the supreme Teacher and only Savior of men. We have found that we could do nothing else with Jesus consistent with reason or faith. Let us, therefore, take our place humbly at His feet, as He has invited us to do, to learn of Him.

Chief among the great lessons which Jesus came to teach the world is the Fatherhood of God. "No one," said he, "knoweth the Son save the Father; neither doth any know the Father save the Son, and He to whomsoever the Son willeth to reveal Him."* This statement just precedes His gracious invitation to all that labor and are heavy laden to come unto Him for rest and to take His yoke upon them and learn of Him. We may be sure, therefore,

*Matt. 11:27.

Helps to Faith

that one of the great lessons He was thinking of teaching them in order to give them rest was God's Fatherhood. What else, indeed, could bring so much solace and strength to the weary and sin-burdened souls of men as the knowledge that God, the Maker of all worlds, enthroned in glory and power, is their Father? This was a conception of Jehovah that had not entered into the heart of the common people. They had thought of Him as a being of might and majesty, terrible in judgment and capable at times of extending mercy to those who had offended against His law; but that He was a father possessing a father's heart, and ready to grant forgiveness to His children and reinstatement in His favor on evidence of true repentance, and this without respect of persons, was a conception they had not reached.

It would be impossible to exaggerate the value of this great truth which Jesus revealed to men, and made real to them not by His teaching alone, but by His life and character. "He that hath seen me," said He to Philip, "hath seen the Father."* This in response to Philip's plea, "Lord, show us the Father, and it sufficeth us!" Was not this cry of Philip an

*John 14:9.

Learning of Jesus

expression of the universal desire of the human heart, burdened with its sense of guilt and perplexed with the mighty problems of the present and of the future? If you know Me, said Jesus, you know the Father. He and I are one, having the same nature and the same character. Every deed of mercy, every miracle to relieve human pain and suffering, every word of forgiveness and love, every effort of my life to draw men away from the seductive paths of evil to follow after righteousness, is but an expression of God's father-heart going out in infinite yearning for the salvation of men.

This was a part of the message which God had to deliver to men which could not be conveyed through prophet or seer. Only the Son could reveal it, and He only through becoming incarnate, illustrating the Father's disposition toward men by His own character and tender ministries. "In Him was life and the life was the light of men."* And nothing but the life would have been an adequate light on this great problem of God's Fatherhood. Only the divine life, lived under human conditions, could reveal to men its true character and purpose. As stated in a previous chapter concerning the

*John 1:4.

Helps to Faith

revelation of God's love, which is closely akin to, and a necessary corollary of, His Fatherhood, herein lies the necessity for the incarnation, and this necessity furnishes the strongest antecedent probability of its reality and reasonableness. If God's true relation to men is that of Father, and if His real character is best expressed by the name love, and if these truths could be conveyed to mankind in no other way so truly and effectively as through the incarnation, then how could we vindicate God's character for wisdom and goodness without the fact of the incarnation?

We have now reached a point at which it is easy to understand why Jesus laid the supreme emphasis upon the question, "Whom say ye that I am?" It was only as the Son of God that He could reveal the Fatherhood of God. Everything, therefore, hinged upon His personality—His divine and unique Sonship. Hence He declared, "On this rock I will build my church." Out of this rock, smitten with the hammer of right reason and of honest, inquiring faith, flows the whole stream of Christianity which has proven to be the water of life to the nations. How many fountains of truth, clear, sparkling and life-giving, take their rise from

Learning of Jesus

this foundation truth! We have seen that God's Fatherhood is one of these fountains, and that it is a prolific mother of streams which have blessed the race and enriched the faith of men. Let us note two of these:

Not only is it true that the incarnation was essential in order to make real to men the Fatherhood of God, but it is also true that on the other hand the Fatherhood of God furnishes the *motive* for the incarnation. It has long been a stumbling-block to many people that God, who is the Maker of all worlds, should manifest Himself in human form on the earth, which is but a speck, as it were, in the vast infinity of worlds. Mr. Spencer has stated this objection to the incarnation in his own characteristic way, asking if we can believe that "the Cause to which we can put no limits in space or time and of which our entire solar system is a relatively infinitesimal product, took the disguise of a man?" A sufficient reply to this objection is that given by the author of "The Fact of Christ," who, quoting this language of Mr. Spencer, adds, "He may think he is giving us an imposing conception of God; but no conception of God is less imposing than that which represents Him as a kind

Helps to Faith

of millionaire in worlds, so materialized by the immensity of His possessions as to have lost the sense of the incalculably greater worth of the spiritual interests of even the smallest part of them.''* This is finely and truly said. What a false conception of God that is which represents Him as so concerned with His infinitude of revolving worlds that He would not think it worth while to stoop down to one of the smaller planets like the earth to redeem a fallen race!

The absurdity of this view is magnified when we remember that these fallen men and women are God's children. What earthly father is there worthy of the name, who, if he owned the whole earth by a title deed, would not willingly surrender it to save even one of his own children? No one thought it strange that the father of Charley Ross spent his fortune and his life in traveling over the world in search of his lost boy. It was just what we would expect a true father to do. Is God so much less compassionate than man that He would permit millions upon millions of His children, wearing His own image, to sink into the irretrievable depths of sin and moral degradation without putting forth the highest possible effort to save

*The Fact of Christ, pp. 135-36.

Learning of Jesus

them because they happened to live in one of the smaller worlds in His great universe? The whole conception is grossly materialistic. Jesus taught that a human soul was worth infinitely more than the whole world. No one who has ever felt the parental impulse of love, and who has come to understand the Fatherhood of God, can remain without the knowledge of an adequate motive for the incarnation and for the cross. When we clearly grasp this fundamental conception of God's relation to humanity, the fact of the incarnation becomes at once reasonable and even necessary.

Moreover, this truth of God's Fatherhood and its corollary, that man is a child of God, explains why God would deal with men by the method of the incarnation and the cross. Such a being, clothed with the sublime prerogative of choice, must be won by moral motives, by the power of love. Since the highest expression of divine love and therefore the highest possible moral power which God can exert, is brought to bear on men through the incarnation and crucifixion of Christ, ought we not to expect that this means would be used of God for the accomplishment of His purpose? The case may be stated thus: Man's character can only

Helps to Faith

be transformed through moral and spiritual power; the highest expression of moral power is love, and the supreme manifestation of love is seen in the self-humiliation and suffering of Christ. But as it is God's purpose to effect the moral transformation of men, it follows that the incarnation and death of Christ are in the line of God's purpose, and are the most efficient means of accomplishing it.

Other corollaries follow from this great truth of God's Fatherhood and love, revealed by Christ, but these will suffice to show the necessity which underlies the incarnation, and the supreme value of this first great lesson which we have learned by sitting at His feet. We must hear Him further.

VIII

AT THE FEET OF JESUS

LET us linger, a while yet, at the feet of Jesus, as the supreme Teacher of the world, to learn what He has to say to us further concerning the Father and concerning true religion. We have already learned from Him to call God "Our Father." This one sublime truth has modified all our conceptions of religion, as we are coming to better understand its import, and is revolutionizing the theologies of past centuries. No doctrine of God that is inconsistent with His fatherhood can endure. No conception of religion which does not flow out of, and harmonize with, the doctrine of God's fatherhood can stand the test of time and criticism. In that most beautiful of the parables, the prodigal son, Jesus has shown us how God, as Father, feels toward His prodigal children, and how He will receive them when they turn away from their sins and seek his face. We have learned also from Jesus, as a corollary from His fatherhood, that love is the supreme motive of God in all His

Helps to Faith

dealings with men. This one truth has overthrown, forever, all those theories which, in one form or another, conceived of God as being so angry at man for his sins, and so full of wrath, that it required nothing less than the death of His Son to appease His anger and reconcile Him to man. All these unworthy conceptions have gone down before a new realization of the truth contained in the statement that "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him might not perish, but have everlasting life."

Jesus revealed another truth about God, which may also be regarded as a corollary from His fatherhood and love, namely, His providential care for all the creatures of His hand, and especially for man, His child. It is often one of the most difficult things of faith to believe that the God of all worlds, and of all races and tribes of beings that inhabit these worlds, cares for us individually. One is apt to feel that his life is so small and insignificant a part of the great universe of life and being that God may overlook it. It is easy, comparatively, to believe in His general providential guidance of the race, under some general system of law, but

At the Feet of Jesus

it is a severe test of our faith to believe that He has a plan for each individual life, and that He cares for and is deeply concerned about the welfare of each one of us. What did Jesus have to say about that? He taught that not even a sparrow falls to the ground unnoticed by Him, much less can the human soul, made in His image, struggle and suffer defeat and sorrow without His being concerned about it. He told His disciples that the very hairs of their heads were numbered by His heavenly Father, meaning that His divine care extended over all the minutiae of their lives. Are we in need of daily bread, of raiment, of the things necessary to our material comfort? Our Father knoweth that we have need of all these things. He has not left our material wants out of His plan and providence for us. We may be sure, therefore, that He has included the necessities of our higher nature in that gracious providence which encompasses all our lives.

What greater comfort, what greater source of strength and of endurance can we have, in times of perplexity and of trouble, which come to us all, than the assurance that our Father in heaven has a plan for each of our individual lives; that He knows about the troubles that

Helps to Faith

burden us and the difficulties that beset us; and that He will see to it that a way of escape is provided, and that these trials will be overruled for our good. "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you."* This does not mean that we are first, in the order of time, to seek the kingdom of God, and then every other blessing will follow, but that we should daily and continually, in all our choices, place the kingdom of God above all material considerations and make everything else subordinate to that. To such an one, all these things—the necessities of our material nature—will be added. Hence, there should be no anxious thought about what we shall eat, or what we shall drink, or wherewithal we shall be clothed. The God who feeds the sparrows, who paints the lilies of the field with a beauty that surpasses the royal robes of Solomon, will not fail to care for His children. Such is the teaching of Jesus, concerning the universal and special providence of God.

The infinite value of the human soul is another of the lessons which Jesus taught us. "What doth it profit a man," He asked, "if he

*Matt. 6:33.

At the Feet of Jesus

shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul?"* The implication is that the man would be an infinite loser who should gain the whole world, with its wealth and with all its transient pleasure, honor and glory, and lose his real self, his higher and his enduring nature. He taught, too, that it was a matter of little concern, relatively, what men should do to our bodies, indicating that the chief peril which we ought to fear is that which threatens the welfare of the soul. This is why he taught men to "seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness."

This is only giving chief consideration to that which is of chief value. No one can be said to be a learner of Jesus, who places the wants of the body above those of the soul and who imperils the welfare of the soul, in his greed for accumulating worldly possessions. To one who prided himself that he had much goods laid up for many years and was wholly unconcerned about his spiritual condition, Jesus said, "Thou fool, this night shall thy soul be required of thee, and then whose shall these things be?"† Throughout the entire teaching of Christ this note of

*Matt. 16:26. †Luke 12:20.

Helps to Faith

emphasis of the supreme value of the human soul above all material considerations, is constantly heard. This is in entire harmony with His view of man as a child of God and, therefore, capable of development into the likeness of God. There is no greater obstacle to the progress of the kingdom of God and to the individual development of character, than the materialism which ignores this distinction which Jesus makes between the material and the spiritual, and the infinite superiority of the latter over the former.

We can never appreciate the teaching of Jesus concerning life and death and the higher obligations of the kingdom of God until we can get His point of view touching the value of the human soul. Once we have gained this view of man and his worth, everything else in His teaching becomes comparatively easy. It explains why He loved men and was willing to die for them. He saw in man what no other teacher of religion ever saw—the capabilities of infinite spiritual progress, and believed in the recoverability of man from the dominion of evil, as no one else ever believed in it. Nothing furnished a greater stumbling-block to the Pharisees and Scribes of His time than His

At the Feet of Jesus

association with publicans and sinners, whom they regarded as utterly unworthy of notice. But Jesus saw deeper into human nature and recognized possibilities of moral betterment which they could not see.

This teaching of Jesus as to the supremacy of man's spiritual nature, helps us to understand his teaching about sin. He located it in the heart. Sin is not something external, consisting merely in outward acts, but He traced its source back to the heart, the seat of the inner life, whence proceed all adulteries, murders and every evil deed. Here is where the teaching of Jesus went beyond and superseded that of the law. The Scribes and Pharisees of His time conceived of righteousness as consisting in external acts of compliance with legal regulations, but Jesus taught that unless the righteousness of men exceeded that of the Scribes and Pharisees they could in no wise enter into the kingdom of God. This righteousness was to consist in purity of heart, in holy desires and aspirations, in right purposes and intentions. The beatitudes set forth His conception of what kind of a character he should possess who is to be a citizen of the kingdom of God. The poor in spirit, hungering and thirsting after

Helps to Faith

righteousness, meek in disposition, pure in heart, makers of peace, and having the love which endures persecution and prays for one's enemies—these are they who are fit subjects of the spiritual reign of Christ. The opposites of these virtues were the sins which Jesus regarded as most perilous to the souls of men. Nothing is more characteristic of the religion of Jesus than its inwardness—its design and its power to purify the sources of man's thoughts, desires and actions. He rebuked the Pharisees for being so punctilious about what they should eat, lest they should be defiled, and so indifferent about the condition of the heart out of which all real moral defilement proceedeth. "Make the tree good and the fruit will be good," was His idea of the relation between character and life—between the inward nature and the outward conduct. In all our insistence on obedience to all God's requirements, we must never lose sight of this distinction, and of this essential relation between the inward purpose and the outward act.

Having now studied in this chapter the lessons of Jesus concerning God's providential care, the supreme worth of the human soul, and the nature of sin as defiling the very fountains

At the Feet of Jesus

of life, and the emphasis which Jesus placed on the necessity of inward purification, we may turn to study, under His guidance, the doctrine of the new spiritual creation in and through Him as the condition of realizing His ideals of character.

IX

HOW THE IDEAL IS MADE REAL

JESUS has not only shown us the Father, but He has also shown us man at his best—the ideal man. Not only by His teaching, as in the Sermon on the Mount, has He drawn the picture of the ideal character of a citizen of the kingdom of God, but especially in His life has He shown us that picture in vivid colors. A recent author of great spiritual insight names four controlling elements of Christ's character, namely, purity, love, forgiveness, humility.* These are said to be distinctive features of the character of Jesus, because no one, before or since, has ever exhibited these qualities to the same degree. He, of all the sons of men, presented the spectacle of a sinless life. He gave to the word *love* a new meaning—deeper, higher, wider than anything the world had any conception of before Him. So prominent was His forgiving spirit that it is frequently spoken of, when seen in others, as the Christian spirit. It is everywhere the infallible mark of a generous

*The Fact of Christ.

How the Ideal is Made Real

nature imbued with the divine spirit. Humility, as one of the cardinal virtues, finds its highest illustration in the life of Jesus. Himself Lord and Master of men, He yet deemed no service too lowly for Him to render in the interest of humanity. Worldly honors, place and power had no attractions for Him. He came not to be ministered unto, but to minister.

The question then arises, why such a lofty ideal of character should have been held up before the world, if men are unable to realize it. This question might well have been asked, and its answer would have been exceedingly difficult, if Jesus, in presenting such an ideal, had presented no way by which the ideal could be realized in human life and character. No one knew so well as He the limitations of our human nature under the dominion of evil as He found it and knew it. It was this fact of the inability of man unaided from above to realize the purpose for which he was created that made Christ's mission into the world a necessity. His life must become so incorporated in the life of humanity as to become available to all who might desire to appropriate it in their struggle to lift themselves above themselves into a higher order of life. His mission in life

Helps to Faith

was to be, not simply a teacher, but a Savior, and even His teaching was but a part of His process of saving men. What was the other part of that process?

It is a fact which all human experience and observation corroborate, that teaching alone is not an adequate remedy for the moral ills and imperfections of human life. While the teaching, if it be of a high and noble character, may present an ideal which creates a *desire* for its realization, there is lacking the power to make the ideal real. The light which Christ gave to men concerning God and concerning human nature as it is, and as it ought to be, was quite essential to man's salvation, but unless some means had been devised by which added strength could be given to the human soul, it could never escape the bondage to appetites and passions, in a word, to the lower nature. How is this strength to be secured? How is it imparted? Jesus teaches, and all history confirms the teaching, that He is not only the ideal of human life, but the power by which that ideal is to be realized. It is this fact that makes Jesus infinitely more than a mere reformer, whose ideals must forever remain impracticable. He has within Himself the

How the Ideal is Made Real

power to rehabilitate character, to bring the human spirit, to use His own impressive figure, into a new birth, in which it makes such connection with the spiritual forces that reside in Christ that it is enabled to overcome the solicitations to evil, both from within and without, and to triumph in His name.

It is not our purpose in this volume to deal with processes so much as with facts, and the great fact to which we now call attention is that Jesus Christ proposes and actually does create a new spirit within man, by purifying his heart and imparting new strength to the inward man, by which he is enabled to realize, progressively, the new ideal of life which is placed before him in Christ. In other words, He not only, by His teaching concerning God and by the loveliness of His own perfect life, creates a desire in men to live a truer and better life, but He furnishes the power by which that desire may be gratified, to those who put themselves in proper relation to Him to enable them to receive such strength. What that relation is has already been indicated. Men must believe on Him as the son of God and as the Savior of man. This will cause them to open their minds and hearts toward Him, so

Helps to Faith

that they may receive from Him the light and life and power they need to overcome their sins, and become free men in Him. As we have already seen, there is abundant foundation for such faith, in the facts of Christ's life, in His character and in His teaching, and especially in the marvelous influence which that life has exerted and continues to exert over mankind.

Our point here is to show that the teaching of Christ and the provisions which He has made for human salvation, are adapted to human needs as we see them and know them to-day, and as they have ever been. If Christ had not offered to those who believe on Him new strength to overcome their evil habits, we could not but feel that, however beautiful may be the doctrine which He taught, the life which He lived is impracticable for us, and hence His religion is a practical failure. But since He adapts His religion to our actual needs and reaches down His omnipotent hand to the lowest depths of sin where man has fallen and offers to lift him out of his moral degradation, He has taken all excuse away from men. We need not live sinful and degraded lives now unless we really prefer to do so, and so long as that

How the Ideal is Made Real

remains our choice there is no power in all the infinite resources of heaven to save us against our will. There is much, however, in Christ's gospel and in the winsomeness of His character, to cause men to choose righteousness rather than iniquity, and life rather than death; but there is nothing to force that will by sheer omnipotence into such a choice. Indeed, it may as well be stated here that unless there is a willingness to live the best life possible, and to pursue the noblest ideals, these arguments we have presented will be null and void. It is only the soul that is hungering and thirsting after righteousness, but has been confused in its search for a stable basis of faith by the clashing creeds and discordant notes of Christendom, that is likely to be helped to an enduring faith by the things we are saying. There is no logic or reason strong enough to convince an unwilling mind of the claims of Christ or of the truth of Christianity.

If it be asked, how could Jesus Christ who lived nineteen centuries ago come into such personal contact with the human spirit to-day as to impart to it new ideals, new strength and all the spiritual graces which are needed to make man Christlike? the answer is in the

Helps to Faith

words of Jesus, "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." This same promise is given to His disciples in another form, when He promised to send them "another comforter," the Holy Spirit, or the Spirit of truth, who should abide with them forever. It is the marvel and the miracle of history which proves Jesus to be more than man, that after the lapse of nearly two millenniums His power and influence are increasingly potent in molding the characters of men, of governments and of civilization. This promise of Jesus to be present with His disciples in the preaching of His gospel, throughout all the coming centuries, finds its repeated fulfillment in millions of personal experiences in which human souls have come into touch with the divine power, and have received strength to turn away from their sins and to live new lives of joy and of consecrated Christian service. Jesus Christ was never so much in the world which He has redeemed as He is to-day. At no time has it been easier for a human soul, burdened with its sense of guilt and longing for a purer and better life, to touch the hem of His garment and be healed. He has but to reach out his hand of

How the Ideal is Made Real

faith to feel the pressure of the hand that was pierced for him.

Jesus, then, is something more than a Revealer of God, and of the divine ideal of manhood. He is the Regenerator of mankind. He is the power by which His own divine ideals are to be realized. Through Him, we too, can attain to purity, love, forgiveness, humility, and so come into the moral likeness of Him who is the noblest ideal of life, and who would have all men share in His glory and perfection. His method of accomplishing this end, and of providing for the remission of sins remains to be considered.

X

THE MEANING OF CHRIST'S DEATH

WE have come now to the greatest tragedy of all history, and to the deepest problem of religion—the death of Christ and its relation to human salvation. Into this holy of holies no one should enter except in a spirit of profound humility and reverence. Moreover, our point of view should continually be kept in mind in all this discussion, as indicated by the title of this work. To present Christ's death in a way that will make it a help rather than a hindrance to faith, is our purpose.

There can be no doubt that the death of Christ by crucifixion has been a stumbling-block, not to the Jews alone, but to many others. Even to-day the cross of Christ is an offence to many minds. With the fact of Christ's death itself, we need to deal only very briefly. It is enough, perhaps, to say that on Christ's side it was a voluntary laying down of His life for the world's redemption; while on the human side it was no less the carrying out of a wicked plot on the part of the Jewish

The Meaning of Christ's Death

priesthood to put Jesus out of the way, as a disturber of their inherited religion, and a teacher of religious principles which would undermine their authority and make an end of that narrow particularism which had come to characterize the Jews of that time. It is important to understand that Christ's tragic death, at the hands of His enemies, was not an unforeseen incident. He Himself foreknew it, and as soon as He had brought the Twelve to an understanding of His true nature and mission, as the Christ, the son of God, He immediately began to foretell His sufferings and death by the Jewish authorities. It was a part of the program that lay in the divine mind even before the creation of man. In the graphic language of scripture, Christ "stood as a lamb slain from before the foundation of the world." It was the most difficult task which Christ had to accomplish, in the training of His apostles, to make them understand that His death was an essential part of the plan by which His kingdom was to be established in the world. It was not until after His resurrection that they were enabled to see how His death, so far from being the destruction of all their fondest hopes and aspirations, was the very means by which

Helps to Faith

they could be realized. In the light of the open sepulchre the dark sayings of Jesus before His death became luminous, and they understood then, as they could not before, "how that Christ must needs suffer and rise from the dead," in order to the fulfillment of His mission in the world.

When we come to the problem of the meaning of Christ's death, we enter upon what has been a battlefield of religious thought through all the Christian centuries. But out of all this conflict of thought, in which many false theories of what has been called the atonement, have been overthrown or outgrown, there have come certain generally accepted conclusions as to the spiritual significance and value of Christ's sacrificial death. It would be presumption to suppose that human thought has yet exhausted the meaning of Christ's life and death. What we state here may be regarded simply as some of the conclusions which have been reached and generally accepted as touching the relation of Christ's death "to us men and our salvation."

Looked at from the divine point of view, so far as we are able to understand it, the work which God desired to accomplish for humanity was, to win men from sin and from the love of

The Meaning of Christ's Death

sin, to love and obedience to Himself, and to extend forgiveness for the sins of the past. In other words, man was alienated from God, and it was God's purpose to bring about a *reconciliation* between man and Himself. This is one of the great New Testament words that express the meaning of Christ's mission into the world. God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, and the apostles received the reconciliation.* This was Christ's mission into the world. An important part of this work had been accomplished by His life and His teaching, but there remained something yet to make His work efficacious for human redemption. The highest proof of His love and the love of the Father was not yet given, as we have heretofore stated, until He had laid down His life, "the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God." This language of Peter states, in a comprehensive way, the purpose of that death. History shows that such has been the effect of Christ's death—the bringing of men to

* "Employing the scriptural name that seems most exact, we call that which Christ has effected Reconciliation between God and Men. By this is meant, that the mission of Christ has been the means of bringing God and men into moral unity and practical fellowship, and that the work of Christ in his mission, tended directly to this result."—*Dr. W. N. Clarke.*

Helps to Faith

God. It is by bringing men to God, that the reconciliation must be effected, since man's sin had produced the alienation. It is not difficult to see how the death of Christ, as a voluntary act for our sakes, has this effect. It was at once the highest revelation of God's love for a sinful world, and of the awful nature of sin. If God so loves the world as to be willing to give His Son to die for its redemption from sin, and if sin be so heinous in its character, so malignant in its spirit, so terrible in its consequences, as to put to death the innocent and holy Son of God, and as to necessitate such a sacrifice on God's part for its expiation, what higher motive could be furnished to the human heart and mind to accept God's proffered love, and turn away from sin—that awful blot on the fair universe of God? The cross is divine love appealing to human love; it is the heart of God calling for a response from the human heart. And not in vain. "We love God because He first loved us." And this love of God was manifested in "that while we were yet sinners Christ died for the ungodly." When God had given to humanity the vision of an ideal manhood, of a pure and holy character, in Jesus Christ, and had unveiled, so to speak, His own

The Meaning of Christ's Death

heart of infinite love in the sacrifice He had made in giving His only begotten Son to die for us, that He might win us back to Himself, He had furnished the highest possible motive and the strongest power possible for calling men to repentance and faith, and to newness of life. Only by moral and spiritual power can the moral and spiritual regeneration of man be effected. No higher moral power can be conceived than is furnished to us in the gospel—"that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that He was buried, and that He hath been raised on the third day, according to the scriptures."

But how about the past with its multiplied sins which have separated us from God? Through Christ, God pledges the forgiveness of our sins, so that they are "remembered against us no more forever." Christ's death stands vitally related to the fact of forgiveness. Jesus Himself declared that His death was "in order to remission of sins." This was the apostolic interpretation of its meaning. The phrase, "remission of sins," we are to understand, not simply as forgiveness of sin's guilt, but as the putting away of the sins themselves, so that they shall appear no more in the lives of those

Helps to Faith

from whom they have been sent away. He also expressed the meaning of His death as being "a ransom for many." In this language men are conceived as being in bondage to sin, and His death as having the power to liberate them from this bondage and secure for them forgiveness of sins. It is impossible not to see some connection between Christ's death and the animal sacrifices which had been so long in practice, not by God's people alone, but in some form or other by all ancient peoples. Even Mr. Harnack, whom many of us believe to be too much swayed by the rationalistic preconceptions so dominant in Germany, says in his most recent work: "No reflection of 'the reason,' no deliberation of 'the intelligence,' will ever be able to expunge from the moral ideas of mankind the conviction that injustice and sin deserve to be punished, and that everywhere that the just man suffers, an atonement is made which puts us to shame and purifies us. It is a conviction which is impenetrable, for it comes out of those depths in which we feel ourselves to be a unity, and out of the world which lies beyond the world of phenomena. Mocked and denied as though it had long perished, this

The Meaning of Christ's Death

truth is indestructibly preserved in the moral experience of mankind."*

In this need, lying in the depths of human nature, we have the explanation, on the human side, of those sacrifices and gifts which have been offered in the past for human sins as affording the means of approach to God. It is a significant fact, to which Mr. Harnack also calls attention, that the death of Christ put an end to these animal sacrifices. "If there is one thing that is certain in the history of religion, it is that the death of Christ put an end to all blood-sacrifices." This would argue that the death of Christ met, in a deeper and more satisfactory way, that need of the human soul which was temporarily provided for in these sacrifices. "By one offering He hath perfected forever them that are sanctified."†

We have come to see that Christ's death was not to appease the wrath of an angry God, nor to reconcile Him to the world. It is God's way of reconciling the world unto Himself. While answering to this fundamental need of human nature, above mentioned, Christ's death, revealing as it does God's love and man's demerit, serves to bring man to repentance and

* "What is Christianity?" pp. 171, 172. † Heb. 10:14.

Helps to Faith

thus to God. It is the goodness of God that leads man to repentance. Forgiveness of sins is forever impossible in the absence of repentance, and the renewed spiritual life. It is plain, then, to see this vital relation between Christ's death and the forgiveness of sins. It would be rash to deny that there is any further meaning in Christ's death than the power it possesses to bring man to God in penitence and faith; but that much we are sure it does mean. That it has a far-reaching influence on the whole moral universe in relation to the problem of sin, and that in some way, perhaps, by its power to bring men to repentance and faith, it enabled "God to be just while justifying him who is of the faith of Jesus," we cannot doubt. Enough for us, however, to know that God does offer, through the death of His Son, to renew a right spirit within us, to blot out all our past sins, and to strengthen us mightily by His Spirit within us, to live the ideal, that is, the Christian life.

XI

THE NATURE OF FAITH AND ITS RELATION TO SALVATION

WE have seen that the life of Christ, as the incarnation of God, culminating in His death for the remission of sins, is the basis upon which, and the motive by which, God would bring man into reconciliation with Himself and hence to salvation. It has been affirmed, also, that faith is the means, on the human side, by which Christ's life and death, and his resurrection from the dead, are made available for human salvation. It will not be denied by any one that the New Testament repeatedly affirms this connection between faith and salvation, but there are those who feel that this is an arbitrary relation which does not commend itself to reason nor comport with what we know of the character of God. It is with the reasonableness of this requirement that we now purpose to deal.

Perhaps, there is no subject connected with man's salvation about which there have been so many diverse and inadequate views as about

Helps to Faith

faith. Without even referring to these theories let us state at once that the faith-faculty, or the power of belief, is inherent in human nature. If this were not so, Christianity certainly would not be adapted to man as he is. It is the power in man that perceives or apprehends spiritual truth. This is its first aspect. The gospel of Christ appeals to man's moral and spiritual nature. There is in man's nature that which responds to this appeal, and which gives it credence. This is the faith-faculty. It is open-mindedness and open-heartedness toward God. It is the light which is in every man, concerning which Jesus said that if it "become darkness, how great is that darkness!" It is the soul's vision of spiritual realities and its perception of spiritual values. Immorality or a life of gross materialism, may obscure this spiritual faculty, while purity of heart contributes to that faith which enables the soul to see God.

What we have called the faith-faculty, that is, the power to believe, requires the essential facts of Christianity in order to become Christian faith. But the faith which saves is no less dependent upon willingness of heart, upon the soul's hunger and thirst for truth and righteous-

The Nature of Faith

ness. It is this spiritual hunger that is most responsive to truth as it is presented to the mind and heart. It is just here that man's responsibility for his lack of faith comes in. He is not responsible, so long as there are no facts upon which to base a reasonable faith, but when such facts are presented in connection with truths which appeal directly to the divinest part of our nature, then not to give credence to such facts, and not to respond to such truths, is to reject the light and to pass under condemnation. What Jesus calls "a good and honest heart" in the Parable of the Sower, always responds to the appeal of the gospel, according to the measure of light which it has. Here again is another source of stumbling and of doubt. People imagine that they can do nothing of a religious character until their faith has become sufficiently strong to accept and appropriate the whole of God's revelation. This is a mistake. As we have before intimated, the gospel comes to men where they are and it always finds men, no matter what their moral level may be, in some part of their nature. Every man believes some acts to be right and others to be wrong. Every one knows that a certain course of conduct

Helps to Faith

meets with the approval of his conscience, or moral nature, while a different course of conduct meets with its disapproval. Let the soul that is in quest of faith, pursue the course, steadfastly, which his own conscience approves, and turn away from those things which it disapproves, and each forward step taken in harmony with his highest conception of right and duty, will bring him an increased measure of faith. It is the refusal to act upon what we *do* believe that weakens faith and obscures the light that is within us. No one has a right to expect more light until he is true to the light which he has.

In these facts, which we are sure will be found to be true to human nature and human experience, will be found the solution of that old-time problem concerning the relation of faith and repentance, as to which precedes the other. The answer depends, of course, on what we call faith. If we speak of *Christian* faith, that is, faith in Christ as the Son of God and the spiritual Savior of man, it is evident that there must be a turning away from sin which precedes such a faith. There is a belief in a supreme moral Governor of the universe and in the distinction between right and wrong,

The Nature of Faith

which may be said to be practically universal. It exists among all nations, whether they have ever heard the gospel or not. When Christ came into the world, men, both Jews and Gentiles, were told to repent, in order that they might believe the gospel. Here was a repentance that precedes Christian faith, but it does not precede belief in the righteousness of certain things and in the unrighteousness of other things. Men were told that they must be true to the belief or the light which they had, in order that they might receive further light. We are now speaking of that aspect of faith which may be called moral vision, or the power that perceives or appropriates truth. There is another aspect of faith which is further on, and which consists of trust in a Person. This final and matured aspect of faith in which the soul commits itself to Jesus Christ, is not reached except by repentance. But that repentance which puts the soul in an attitude for committing itself to Christ, is the product of the soul's perception of right and truth and duty, which may be called one degree or aspect of faith.

In other words, faith and repentance do not express distinct and independent acts of the

Helps to Faith

soul. They are so related and inter-related that you cannot draw a line between them and say, on that side is faith and on this side is repentance. It is always and forevermore true that obedience to the right must be preceded by a conviction that it *is* right. It is also evermore true that the turning away from sin must be preceded by the knowledge that it *is* sin. This is the truth that underlies the contention that faith precedes repentance. It is faith in its general sense as moral vision, or the moral perception of truth, that thus precedes the change of mind which is called repentance. But it is also true that no man living in known disobedience to moral law, can exercise faith in its highest function, that of trust in a personal Savior. This is the truth that underlies the position that repentance precedes faith. Both positions are true in their proper place, but neither by itself is the whole truth. The faith of the New Testament on which salvation is predicated, includes more than spiritual perception. It involves the affections of the heart, and the submission of the will. The faith that accepts Christ and His conception of righteousness discovers therein a deeper repentance than was possible in the absence of

The Nature of Faith

such faith. The Pauline view that affirms justification by faith, has for its necessary corollary that repentance and obedience to Christ are aspects of faith, or the means by which faith manifests itself and secures its object.

The relation, therefore, between faith and salvation, is not an arbitrary one, but causal and necessary. Faith is the channel through which God communicates with the soul, and introduces into it those regenerative truths and forces which are essential to its moral renovation. In other words, faith is that attitude of the soul toward God which enables it to accept of the offered salvation. To object to faith, therefore as a condition of salvation, is very irrational, seeing that it is in perfect harmony with the laws which govern human action, in every other department of life. Men plant and sow in faith, and all business intercourse between men, corporations and nations, is based on faith. Faith saves, because it links the soul in union with the Savior. The power that saves is in Christ. The hand that lays hold of that power is faith. The two ordinances of the gospel,—baptism and the Lord's supper,—are helps to faith, being means by which faith may express its attitude toward

Helps to Faith

Christ, who is the object of faith. If this truth were once recognized—that none of these conditions of salvation are arbitrary, as if God would fence in salvation and make it difficult for man to secure it, but are rather in the nature of steps by which the soul may ascend to the realization of salvation,—it would save us from many false and injurious conceptions which are contrary to the nature of God and of Christianity.

Having now treated of the nature of faith and its relation to salvation, we may pause here before considering what are the things essential to be believed in order to salvation.

XII

WHAT MUST WE BELIEVE?

THE answers to this question, taken by centuries and shaped according to the dominant religious ideas of each century, would in itself constitute a most instructive history of religious thought. If this question were put to the whole religious world to-day a great variety of answers would be given. Indeed, is it not certain that preachers and theologues of the same religious body would differ materially in their answers to this question? Even those denominations which have authoritative creeds, which churches must endorse to be in good standing in their respective folds, do not claim that the belief of their creeds is essential to salvation, else they would consign to condemnation all who reject such creeds, which they do not do. They all admit that one may have saving faith and be a Christian without believing any one of these creeds. These human formulations of doctrine, then, do not answer the question, What must we believe in order to be a Christian? but they do answer the question as

Helps to Faith

to what one must believe in order to be a member in good standing of the particular denomination which has authorized the creed.

Here, then, we are enabled at once to answer a standing objection on the part of those who make these conflicting creeds an excuse for not accepting the Christian faith and life. Men say, "How do I know what I must believe in order to be saved, when there are so many differing creeds held by different Churches?" The answer to this objection is, that these creeds do not profess to tell inquiring sinners what they must believe in order to be Christians, but only to tell people what they must believe in order to be Episcopalians, Presbyterians, Lutherans, Methodists, Universalists, Unitarians, etc. Since then, they do not claim to present the essential faith, and that alone, but a statement of doctrinal beliefs which the men making them thought necessary to guard the Church from doctrinal errors, their differences in the realm of speculative opinions and deductive reasoning ought to furnish no insuperable obstacle to one in quest of faith—the essential Christian faith. Many a man has been driven into skepticism and infidelity by the false idea that he must be able to accept

What Must We Believe?

some one of these differing creeds in order to be a Christian and be saved.

We turn, then, away from creeds to the Bible which all the creeds recognize as an inspired rule of faith and practice, and especially to the New Testament, which contains the revelation through Christ, to inquire what is essential to Christian faith? One must be blind, indeed, not to see what the New Testament regards as the faith that delivers one from the power of sin and makes one a Christian. It is faith in Jesus of Nazareth Himself as the Christ, the Son of God. It is not intellectual assent to certain doctrinal truths, but faith or trust in Jesus as a divine Person—as the Prophet to teach men true religion; as the high Priest who has made one offering for sin that suffices, the offering up of himself to God for humanity; as the King, who rules in the spiritual domain by right of His divine Sonship, and His pre-eminence in spiritual knowledge and power and the perfection of His character. “He that believeth on the Son hath life,” because “in Him was life, and the life was the light of men.” Jesus Himself presented this truth as the foundation of His Church, as we have previously shown, and His apostles never

Helps to Faith

required any other confession of faith from men, in order to their admission into Christian congregations, than the confession of Christ. It is not, then, primarily, *What* must we believe? but, *Whom* must we believe? The *whom* decides the *what*.

But are we not required to believe in faith, repentance, baptism, the Lord's supper, prayer, and a holy life? No, none of these things are objects of faith. They are commands to be obeyed, or duties to be performed, or privileges to be enjoyed, because we believe in Christ. We cannot substitute any one or all of them for Christ, as the object of faith, nor can we logically classify them along with Jesus Christ as constituting the object of faith. That would be to classify cause and effect together, and would not give Christ the pre-eminence that belongs to Him and which He claims. Not even the Scriptures are the object of Christian faith. The sacred writings are only the medium through which Christ is presented for our faith. They are invaluable in their testimony concerning Christ, but they are no substitute for Christ. To the Jews of His own time Jesus said, "You search the scriptures, because ye think that in them ye have eternal life; and

What Must We Believe?

these are they which bear witness of Me; and ye will not come to Me that ye may have life.”* Eternal life is not in the Scriptures, but in the Christ of whom they testify. John was a witness of Christ, but he himself testified that he was not the Christ. The supreme value of the Scriptures consists in the fact that they contain the testimony of prophets and apostles concerning Jesus of Nazareth, that He is the Christ. “These things are written that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing, ye might have life in His name.”† The Bible contains much that is valuable in the way of history, ethical teaching, devotional writings, literature; but that which gives it its supreme place in the world’s literature, and makes it imperishable, is that it contains a picture of a Life and a Personality so august, so marvelously beautiful, so full of grace and truth, as to win the admiration and challenge the faith of mankind. Because it embodies such a Life, as the supreme revelation of God, the Bible will continue to hold its place in the confidence and love of the world’s best minds and purest hearts.

* John 5:39, 40.

† John 20:31.

Helps to Faith

An inconceivable amount of injury has come to the church through its failure to apprehend what is the object of the faith that saves, or to distinguish between what is vital and what is fundamental in Christian faith, and what is incidental or inferential. All attempts to enforce uniformity of theological beliefs through the creedal system have been based on this misconception of the real content of Christian faith. It would be impossible to estimate how much infidelity has resulted from the indiscriminate mixing up of human philosophy with the divine revelation of God's wisdom and love in Jesus Christ, so that many have been unable to distinguish the one from the other, and finding fault with the human and changeable element, have rejected the divine and unchangeable truth of God as well. How many have stumbled over the doctrine of the "divine decrees," fixing unalterably the fate of men, which no choice or action on their part can change, as if they *had* to believe such a doctrine in order to be a Christian! How many theories of the atonement have been identified with the very *fact* of the atonement, and when they have become untenable because of increasing light, men have felt that they

What Must We Believe?

were giving up the whole Bible and Christ Himself, in parting with their false theory! The same thing is true regarding theories of inspiration, of the operation of the Holy Spirit, of conversion, and of many other Bible facts. The divisions in the Church of God, which are contrary to the spirit and teaching of Jesus and to the plain teaching of the apostles, have resulted from the efforts to enforce human opinions and speculations as divine doctrines, and to make them tests of fellowship. If the Church had been content to maintain its original creed or confession of faith, which, as we have seen, was the Messiahship and deity of Jesus of Nazareth, allowing liberty of opinion in all matters not in conflict with this fundamental faith, she could have retained her unity, conserved her resources for beneficent purposes, stopped the mouths of infidels, and the world, ere this, might have been brought under the reign of Christ.

The effort to restore this original creed of Christianity to its rightful place in the Church, and to make the Christian faith once more personal, instead of doctrinal, and thus to restore the lost unity among Christians, and the purity and simplicity of the gospel, which began

Helps to Faith

in the early part of the past century, was the most important reformation in the church since the Lutheran reformation in the sixteenth century. Indeed, it was and is but the carrying out of the principles of that reformation to their legitimate conclusions. The marvelous success of that movement, in spite of the faults and mistakes of its advocates, is proof of the wonderful vitality of the principles involved. There has been a constant tendency, on the part of some minds, throughout its entire history, to revert to the old system of making opinions and theories tests of fellowship, and to substitute an unwritten for a written creed; but the broader element, representing the real genius of the movement, has always triumphed in the past, and will continue to triumph over all narrowing tendencies in the future, for it shares the indestructible and victorious character of the Christianity of Christ which it is seeking to restore to the world in the fullness of its original power.

XIII

THE HOLY SPIRIT

WE have seen that God's purpose in sending His Son into the world was to bring men into a state of reconciliation with Himself wherein they would receive renewal of life and forgiveness of sins. We have observed, too, how the character of this self-revelation of God, in Christ, is adapted to accomplish this purpose. We have also pointed out the nature of faith, its relation to the salvation that is offered through Christ, and the content of that faith. It remains to be shown how this life, which has its origin in the soul through faith in Jesus Christ, is carried on to completion so that faith is enlarged and confirmed, and the character of the believer is made to conform to that of Christ.

This brings us to the treatment of another high and holy theme, namely, the mission and work of the Holy Spirit. We are dependent upon the Holy Scriptures, and especially upon the New Testament, for our knowledge of this difficult subject, yet Christian experience is an

Helps to Faith

important source of confirmation of the truths taught in the Scriptures. The Bible clearly teaches the threefold manifestation of God in history. We have already spoken of God the Father, as revealed to humanity in Jesus Christ the Son. The New Testament is no less clear and emphatic in its teaching concerning the later manifestation of God in what is called the Holy Spirit, or the Spirit of truth. However men may differ as to the reality of the triune *nature* of God, that is, as to the trinitarian mode of His existence, there can be no doubt, whatever as to the trinity of God's manifestations as recorded in the Bible. In speaking of the Holy Spirit, therefore, we are not to be understood as speaking of some impersonal influence, but of God Himself, working in man for man's salvation. The Holy Spirit is a personality, if God be a personality, for He is none other than God Himself, manifesting Himself as spirit to human spirits in order to complete the work for which He sent His Son into the world. If it be clear from the teaching of the New Testament that God's work in human salvation could not have been accomplished without the agency of the Son, it is no less clear that this work needed also the

The Holy Spirit

agency of the Holy Spirit, who began His special work after Christ's ascension and glorification.

The proof of what is here said is found in the language of Jesus Himself, uttered just prior to His passion, as recorded by John. He told His sorrowing disciples that it was expedient that He should go away, for unless He should go away the Spirit, the Paraclete or Helper, would not come. It is clear, then, that Jesus regarded the coming of the Holy Spirit, in new power and in new relation to humanity, as essential to the welfare of His disciples, and to the carrying on to completion of the work which He had begun during His personal ministry. He tells us, also, what the nature of the work is, which the Holy Spirit will accomplish in the world and in His disciples when He comes. As to the world, He will convince it of sin, of righteousness and of judgment. That is, He will give to the world clear convictions as to the real nature of sin, as to the true character of righteousness, its opposite, and of what God's judgment must be on the great moral issues involved in sin and righteousness. It is not said here how He will do that work, though it may be inferred from the fact that it could

Helps to Faith

not begin until after His death, resurrection and coronation, that these great facts were to be used by the Holy Spirit in carrying out His mission. The history of the beginning of the Church, as recorded in the Acts of the Apostles, shows that this was the approved method of the Spirit in convicting men of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment, namely, through the preaching of the gospel. We need not, however, make any restrictions as to the method of the free Spirit of God in bringing truth to bear upon the minds and hearts of men. Doubtless, this is done in ways that we know not of. But we are safe in following the practice of the Apostolic Church in preaching the gospel of Christ, and expecting the Holy Spirit to accomplish His work through this means, without neglecting, however, the influences which go forth from the Christian home, from the Sunday-school, and from all other agencies and instrumentalities for training the young for God.

The Holy Spirit has a special work to do for Christians. He was to be to them "another Comforter," or better, perhaps, another *Helper*, who would strengthen them with all might, who would guide them into all necessary truth,

The Holy Spirit

and who would, in a word, enable them to realize the character which it is the purpose of the gospel to form in all believers. We must not limit these promises of Christ, concerning the Holy Spirit, to the apostles or to the believers of that age, for He was to abide with them forever. The Holy Spirit is not less active in the Church to-day than it was in the days of the apostles. It does not follow that He will qualify men for the same work which was done in that age, and which does not need to be repeated, but He is none the less active and powerful in adapting the truth of the gospel to the varying needs of successive ages, and to the changes in the conditions of the world and of the Church. Nothing could be more inspiring than the recognition of the presence of the Holy Spirit in the Christian people of to-day, enabling them to cope with the problems of the times, and to overcome the difficulties that hinder the progress of God's kingdom in the world. This is true of the Church as a whole, according to the measure of its willingness to be guided by the Spirit, and it is true of each individual believer, limited only by the same law. No doubt unbelief, worldliness and sectarian aims and ambitions have done much

Helps to Faith

to hinder the work of the Holy Spirit; but there is always "a remnant according to the election of grace," and through these elect souls God has shown forth, and is showing forth His truth, and leading the lagging Church onward toward the accomplishment of its great mission.

What is here hinted at in regard to the growth of the individual believer in righteousness and toward perfection of character, is the New Testament doctrine of sanctification. It is the work of the Holy Spirit in the believer to carry forward, progressively, this work of God in the human soul, until it is transformed into the likeness of Christ. "He makes Christ ever more truly known, taking what is His and manifesting it to the soul. He constantly calls out new faith in Christ, new love toward God and man, new hope of further blessing and progress. He brings home to the heart the truths that are helpful to the growth of holiness. He turns the various events of life to their sanctifying use, and teaches to the child the Father's lessons. He wakens the spirit of prayer in the heart, and suggests such desires as accord with the Father's will. He confirms and educates the Christian virtues, and extends the field of goodness in the life.

The Holy Spirit

He tenderly broods over the entire soul and its living, ministering silent but effective help to all that is holy. His invisible presence is sometimes unperceived, and His work, with its precious fruits, is attributed to natural causes, as if natural progress were enough to bring Christians to perfection. But the glory of the Christian life is the indwelling of the living God as a guiding and sanctifying Spirit. The inner Christian life is not merely human; it is divine, both in its origin and in the source from which it is perpetually maintained. The presence of the sanctifying Spirit is the Christian's hope.' '*

We are not to be discouraged, then, with either the weakness or crudeness of men's faith, if it be genuine faith in God, as revealed in Christ, and made real to men through the Holy Spirit. That only is real to us in religion which is made a part of our inner experience, and thereby ceases to be dependent wholly on external testimony. It is the mission of the Holy Spirit, as relates to the individual believer, to carry forward the work which has been begun in him until it reaches the divine goal. Without this aid of the Spirit—Christ's

*Dr. Clarke's "Outline of Christian Theology," pp. 409, 410.

Helps to Faith

representative—the future would not be full of inspiring hope as it is. We may be sure that out of all our weaknesses and crudeness of views, and all of our moral imperfections, God intends to bring, at last, if we are led by His Spirit, unity, completeness and fullness of life and love.

XIV

CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE, OR GOD IN US

It is much to be feared that the abuse to which the phrase "Christian experience" has been subjected, has caused many of us to overlook the value and significance of our individual Christian experiences, as proof of the reality of God and of His life-giving power as manifested in Christ. A little reflection, however, ought to convince anyone that no amount of external testimony would suffice to overcome the power of unbelief and the tendency to evil within our human nature, without the present actual results of the power of Christ, felt and seen in our own lives and in the lives of those about us. It is worth while, therefore, to consider very carefully what is meant by Christian experience, and its evidential value as relates to the divine character and mission of Jesus Christ.

The end and aim of Christ's mission, as we have seen, is the reproduction in men of the life that was in Him. He came, to use His own words, that men "might have life and that

Helps to Faith

they might have it more abundantly.” This life, which of necessity must have its origin within the soul of man as an inner spiritual force, was to manifest itself in the new character and conduct of those who possessed it, or rather were possessed by it. It was the Founder of Christianity Himself who taught that, as a tree is known by its fruits, so His religion in its relation to men was to be known by the kind of character and conduct it produced. In laying down this rule He subjected His religion and His whole power as a Savior of men to the test which could be applied by all men. It was as if He had said, “There is no need that you should be in doubt as to My real character and mission. If belief in Me, as the Son of God, and obedience to My teaching, does not result in transformed lives and characters, you shall know by that fact that I am not of God. But on the contrary, if the result of faith in Me and acceptance of My teaching be the reception of new power by which the believer is enabled to live a new and better life, then by this sign you may know that God is in Me, reconciling the world unto Himself and communicating life to men.”

It is evident from this and similar teaching

Christian Experience, or God in Us

of Jesus, that He expected that the moral and spiritual results of His teaching would be the final proof to men of its divine nature and authority. And why should it not be so? It is the rule that we apply in every other department of life. Who would believe in a physician, no matter what his scientific attainments, nor how great his claims, if he effected no cures, and had no healed patients to testify to the efficacy of his treatment? Who would believe in the ability of a farmer, who, from year to year, failed to produce crops? How long would men commit their children to teachers who failed to educate? What ship-builder could command orders for building vessels who had never constructed one that was able to navigate the seas? So Christ and His religion would long since have been remanded to the dead issues of the past, if there had been no continuous stream of life flowing from them, purer, sweeter, diviner than the life of the world. It is not enough that Jesus Christ, nearly 2,000 years ago, in the land of Palestine, wrought many wonderful works and succeeded in transforming the lives of His immediate followers. What is He doing in the world to-day? His friends claim that He is risen

Helps to Faith

from the dead, and is alive forever more. What are the proofs of His present power over the lives of men, and on the laws and institutions of the present age? These are questions the world will ask, and which it has the *right* to ask, and which Christians must not shrink from answering.

What we mean, then, by Christian experience is the presence and power of the immanent God working in human lives to-day, and producing results which neither the world nor the things of the world can produce. What better proof than this can any soul have of the divinity of its religion? Is it not the neglect of this direct personal testimony of our own consciousness to the power of God, "working in us both to will and to do His good pleasure," that has given rise to so many fears and doubts as to the ability of Christianity and of the Bible to stand the test of modern evangelical or rationalistic criticism? Whoso lives in such personal relations with God and has such daily proofs of His presence within him, strengthening him in all right-doing and reproving him for every slightest departure from the right, cannot easily be alarmed as to the stability of the foundations of faith. It is not in the power of criticism,

Christian Experience, or God in Us

higher or lower, destructive or constructive, to overthrow the testimony of the soul of the Christian man to the fact that, whereas he was once morally and spiritually blind, he now sees; and that whereas he was once a slave of sin, bound by invisible chains under the dominion of evil, he is now free; and that whereas he was once burdened with a sense of guilt which seemed to hide the face of God, he now rejoices in the knowledge of sins forgiven and in the consciousness of daily communion with his Heavenly Father. The times in which we live demand that we give more emphasis to this testimony that comes from within, but that manifests its reality in the outward life and conduct.

We have spoken of Christian experience as the work of God in the human soul. It is, therefore, a part of that broader conception of God's immanence which is doing so much to shape anew all our modern thought. Concerning this conception a recent author of distinction has said: "This thought of the immanence of the transcendent God is a magnificent conception, that is destined powerfully to influence religion, theology, science and common life. It is at once so vast and so new an

Helps to Faith

idea as scarcely to have begun its work. If our own God thus pervades the universe with his presence, purpose, and action, then indeed 'every place is hallowed ground.' Nothing is profane, all is sacred. The universe is sanctified by the presence of its God, and we have no right to think of nature or of life without the reverence for which His presence calls. Christian thought will some day more strongly grasp this splendid conception, that the God and Father of Christ, our Father who is in heaven, is present in His whole creation, providing it with power to exist and end to exist for. By this thought worthily grasped all life will be elevated and purified. Religion will be freshly inspired, theology will be transfigured, and science will become a spiritual worship."*

We are now concerned in this doctrine only as it relates to religious experience, and as a part of, and perhaps the best part of, the testimony to the reality of the Gospel as the power of God unto salvation, and of the continuous presence of God with men through all these Christian centuries. It is, in other words, the religious form, which the doctrine of the divine

* "An Outline of Christian Theology," pp. 158, 159.

Christian Experience, or God in Us

immanence assumes in the fulfillment of Christ's promise to be with His followers to the end of the ages. The Christian has direct testimony of the reality of this presence, and of the adaptation of Christianity to meet his deepest wants, and to satisfy the profoundest yearnings of the human heart.*

Christians have been slow to believe and understand the meaning of Christ's promise, "Lo I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." He is fulfilling that promise, as is shown by unnumbered proofs in all the Christian activities of our time, but we are slow to recognize it. Every good impulse in our own hearts, every unselfish deed, every

*It is interesting to notice how the revised rendering of Hebrews 11:2, concerning faith, sets forth the evidential value of Christian experience. The sentence, "For by it the elders obtained a good report," reads in the Revised Version, "For by it the elders *had witness borne to them.*" In two other passages, in the same chapter, (vs. 4 and 39) the same Greek words have the same rendering. Nor is there any doubt as to the accuracy of this translation. The thought is, that the elders all *had witness borne to them* of the reality of the things they believed, and of God in whom they believed, through the self-evidencing power of faith. It is not less true to-day, than it was true of the ancient worthies whose names and deeds are recorded in the 11th chapter of Hebrews—the Westminster Abbey of the New Testament—that it is through faith, obeyed and practiced, that the soul has borne to it the witness of the truth of Christianity and of its adaptation to meet the needs of men. This is how faith is "*the proving of things not seen*" (Heb. 11:1 Rev. Ver).

Helps to Faith

honest longing for a truer and better life, every sincere and earnest prayer, every victory we gain over our lower nature, every movement of the soul Godward, by which we come to look at life and all its problems from the point of view which Christ occupies—all this is proof, incontestable, that God is carrying on in us the work He has begun, and that He will carry it on to completion, if we are willing to be led by His Spirit. It is not until we come to the full recognition of the immanence of God in our Christian experience, and the value of His inworking as proof of the truth of our Christianity, that we can attain to that fullness of faith which found its expression in the words of the Apostle Paul, "I know him whom I have believed, and I am persuaded that he is able to guard that which I have committed unto him against that day."*

*2 Tim. 1:12.

XV

THE CHURCH

NO CAREFUL student of the Bible can fail to be impressed with the gradual unfolding of the divine purpose as it manifests itself in the events of human history. The self-revelation of God passes through its successive stages in patriarchal and Hebrew history, and comes to its sublime culmination in the person of Jesus Christ. This wonderful life passes through its successive stages, culminating in His death for the sins of the world. His death, in turn, is followed by His resurrection from the dead, and this by His ascension and coronation. And then comes the special mission and dispensation of the Holy Spirit, carrying forward in the hearts and lives of men the work of Christ. Out of this movement of the Spirit of God upon human hearts and lives, came that unique Christian experience of which we have spoken—an experience of the new transforming power of Christ on human life, the effect of which is to bring men evermore into harmony with the will of God.

Helps to Faith

It is not to be supposed, for a moment, that this majestic forward movement of the divine purpose ceased with the ascension of Christ and the descent of the Holy Spirit. We have already seen that a new life, and a more abundant life, came into humanity through the work of Christ, supplemented and carried on by the Holy Spirit, and we are now to see that this new life with its new experiences, new joys, new aims, new ambitions, new hopes and aspirations, found expression in a new organism—an association of those who were in possession of this common faith and common life for mutual fellowship, and for perpetuating and extending the new principles of the new religion which they had embraced. This organism is called the Church. It was a divine organism in the sense that its members were joined to Jesus Christ, their living Head, by a bond of faith and allegiance, and to each other by the ties of mutual love, having its source in their common Lord. It may be said, further, to be a divine organism, because the divine Spirit was the impelling force in the believers who thus associated themselves together, and because the principles which governed them in their collective capacity were divinely given. It

The Church

was not an earthly organization resulting from worldly wisdom, and having worldly aims and ambitions, such as the lust of office and the passion for wealth or worldly power. It was rather a fraternity of believers held together by the cohesive power of a common love under the guidance of the same divine Spirit. Hence the Church came into being as naturally, as inevitably, as flowers bloom, as rivers flow and as the tree springs from the acorn. It was the natural outflowing of the divine life through human channels to bless the world. It was, in another sense, the Word becoming flesh and dwelling among men, and showing forth the glory of God. The Church is, in an important sense, an incarnation of the Holy Spirit, as Jesus Christ was the incarnate Word.

The reader will notice that we speak simply of the Church, and one who is familiar with our modern denominationalism may ask what Church we refer to. *There is but one Church.* Jesus Christ is the foundation for the one Church, for "other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." This Church is composed of all true believers in Christ. Christians have fenced themselves apart by calling themselves by different names,

Helps to Faith

and adopting certain ecclesiastical forms and statements of doctrine, but all that does not change the fact that there is and can be but one Church. The Christians that are within these various fenced-up parties, are Christians, not by virtue of their membership in these parties, but because of their faith in Jesus Christ and the possession of His life and spirit. They are Christians, in other words, in *spite* of their denominational peculiarities, rather than in *consequence* of them.

There has never been a day since Pentecost when the Church was not. Wherever true believers have lived, manifesting the spirit and the life of Christ in their lives, there the Church has existed. As one of our own recent writers has said: "Historic continuity is found, not in bishops and priests, not in organization and forms, but in the people who compose the Church—*who are the Church*. Since the founding of the Church on Pentecost, there has been an unbroken succession of Christian people—men and women in whom there lived a diviner life than in other men and women, a life taken from Christ. They have left us their hymns, their prayers, their confessions, the records of their experience, their struggles and sorrows and

The Church

joys. They were made one by the life they lived in Christ. They showed unity and continuity in every age by this life which they lived, not of themselves, but of God. They are seen in ancient Jerusalem and Antioch, and in modern London and New York, in palace and hovel, in priest's robe and in peasant's gown. They are recognized, not by ecclesiastical title or pedigree or millinery, but by the spirit of the Lord Jesus which they have held in common.''*

As a matter of convenience the believers in any given locality naturally meet together for their common worship and their mutual fellowship in Christ. Hence, we have the church at Jerusalem, the church at Antioch, at Corinth, Ephesus, Rome, etc. These were local congregations of Christians, having the common faith and the common life, and were bound together into a common brotherhood by their allegiance to the one Lord. This local use of the term *church* caused no confusion in the early centuries, because it was everywhere understood that these local assemblies were but parts of one common body—the church of the living God. The modern use of the word *Church* to designate a part of the Church uni-

*F. D. Power.

Helps to Faith

versal which holds certain peculiarities of doctrine and government, was wholly unknown to the apostolic age. Inevitable as these denominational divisions and names seem to have been in consequence of the successive reformations which have marked the history of the Church in escaping the great apostasy known in history as Roman Catholicism, they have been none the less confusing and otherwise injurious to the life and progress of the Church. There is good reason to believe that these divisions, unknown to the New Testament, and growing out of a certain temporary condition of things in the life of the Church, will eventually pass away, and the Church will once more assert its essential unity, and go forth to accomplish its sublime mission in the world.

We have dealt with this question of the Church, in this work, because many disturbing problems have arisen out of our divided Christendom, which have proved serious hindrances to faith and a fruitful source of unbelief. But when we come to see how the Church stands related to the new life that is in Christ Jesus, as the visible means for its embodiment and for its propagation throughout the world; when it is understood that Christ has built but one

The Church

Church, and that these walls of temporary division within it have been built by men and are destined to pass away, many of the obstacles to faith will vanish. The historic continuity of the Church has not been destroyed by these divisions, nor will they be permitted to prevent the fulfillment of Christ's prayer for the unity of His believers and for the conversion of the world. The Life of God in Christ has not yet found complete embodiment in any organization.

"Our little systems have their day,
They have their day and cease to be;
They are but broken lights of thee,
And thou, oh Lord, art more than they."

The Church of the future, the Church that is to be, will be a more perfect reflection of the divine will and character, for it is yet to be presented to Christ, "a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing," to mar its beauty, its purity and its divine vigor.

When John, the seer of Patmos, saw in rapt vision, that glorious Church of the future, he described it as "The Holy City, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband." The highest aim of the noblest souls on earth, to-day, is to assist in the building of that Holy City.

XVI

THE LITERATURE OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

IN dealing now with the origin of the New Testament literature, we are following still the divine order. First, there was the gradual and progressive self-revelation of God, reaching its climax in Jesus Christ and culminating in His death and resurrection. Then the Holy Spirit, whose advent was made possible through Christ's work and His subsequent glorification, began His mission on Pentecost. Out of that latest historical manifestation of God, as the Spirit of truth, came the Church, filled with the spirit of faith, of love and of life. And now, as we shall see, there came out of that great spiritual awakening and the new influx of life and light resulting from the dispensation of the Spirit, the remarkable literature which constitutes what we now call the New Testament.

We are apt to think of the New Testament writings as antedating the Church and as being the producing cause of the Church. But such was not the case. This inversion of the divine

The Literature of the New Testament

order arises from confusing together two things which are essentially different, namely, the revelation made through the life and teaching of Jesus Christ, and the literary record of that revelation which was made several years later. It is another popular misconception, closely connected with the one above mentioned, that God's revelations have been made chiefly, if not exclusively, in writing. As a matter of fact, as any careful student of the Bible can see, only a very small part of God's revelations have come in that way. God's method has been to reveal Himself in history, in life, in deeds, and especially in the life of His Son, Jesus Christ. Afterwards holy men, prompted by the Spirit of God, have made record of these revelations, and what we call the Scriptures are the result. This is true as relates both to the Old and to the New Testament Scriptures. "God, having of old time spoken unto the fathers in the prophets by divers portions and in divers manners, hath at the end of these days spoken unto us in His Son." It was not simply *to* these prophets and *to* His Son that God spake, but *in* them, that is, in their lives, in their experiences, in their actions, as well as through their utterances, God's will was made known to men.

Helps to Faith

While this is equally true in both dispensations, the truth of it may perhaps be more readily apprehended in the case of the revelation through Christ. He wrote no book. Not a written line of His has come down to us. His revelation of God was made chiefly through His character, that is, what He *was*, and by His deeds. True, He "spake as never man spake," but He was content to leave His teaching, given in oral form, in the care of His disciples, who, in later years, under the quickening power of His Spirit, would be able to transmit it to the world. But we would strip His revelation of its chief value and significance, did we take out of it His matchless character, His perfect life, His mighty deeds. These revelations of God's character and will were given, of course, during the earthly ministry of Christ; but there was no literary record made of them, at least not any which has come down to us, until years afterwards. There was no New Testament, as we know that book to-day, until years after the Church had been established and the Gospel had made large triumphs in the Roman Empire in winning men to allegiance to Jesus Christ. The great facts which make up the revelation of Christ

The Literature of the New Testament

were delivered orally by those who "preached the Gospel with the Holy Spirit sent down from heaven." It was not until congregations of Christians had been established that any part of the New Testament literature was written, and the earliest of these writings were not the four Gospels, but letters addressed to churches growing out of their needs and designed to furnish necessary instruction to meet the existing emergencies. Later, the task of setting down, in some regular literary form, an account of Christ's life and teaching, His death and resurrection, was undertaken, resulting, among many other productions, perhaps, in the four Gospels which have come down to us.

It is important for the reader to notice that this order of things is the natural order. Literature is a record of life. Out of our Revolutionary War there sprang a literature in which is imbedded the deeds, the results, the heroism, the patriotism, which marked the revolutionary period. Out of our Civil War there came a literature consisting of patriotic songs, patriotic speeches and historical sketches and records of events, which were the product of the peculiar spirit and life of that crisis in our national history. We make a very clear distinction

Helps to Faith

between the battle of Yorktown, for instance, or the battle of Gettysburg and the subsequent histories of these battles. In like manner the revelation of lofty patriotism, of military skill and of wise statesmanship, made in the lives of the great national heroes of these epochs, is never identified or confused with the subsequent record of their lives and their achievements as given in history. In each case it was the preceding life with its deeds that made the literature possible. It is equally true that the wonderful life, the perfect character and the mighty achievements of Jesus of Nazareth, together with His words, in which He manifested the character of God, constitute the real revelation which He made, and that it was completed in His life, death and resurrection. The New Testament literature, which, as we have seen, came afterwards, is the partial record of that revelation. We say the *partial* record, because the New Testament does not pretend to record all that Jesus said and did during His earthly ministry.

It is this vital relation between the New Testament literature and the actual revelation made through Christ, that gives to it its supreme value and its imperishable nature. It

The Literature of the New Testament

is a picture of real life that was lived among men. It is a record of the actual deeds of an actual Person, having for His sublime mission the revealing of the Father in order to win men to spiritual sonship. It is biography, history, prophecy, instruction, precept, example and exhortation, all steeped in the spirit of Christ and all bearing witness to the supreme excellency of Christ and of His religion. The invention of such a record is beyond credibility to any sane mind. It bears the marks, everywhere, of reality. Because Jesus Christ lives, this record of His life and deeds will live, also, and wherever and whenever honest hearts look into this record, they will perceive the presence and the picture of the one perfect Life, and will be drawn towards it as the needle to the pole, because "in Him was life and the life was the light of men."

It may be asked what practical benefit comes from the distinction we have pointed out between God's revelation, which was made largely through life and action, and the subsequent record of it in the Scriptures. In the first place, it seems to us very helpful to faith to see that God has followed the natural order of things in making Himself known to men,

Helps to Faith

instead of employing arbitrary and unusual methods. And then the distinction helps us to understand the true relation between revelation and inspiration. Clearly, it was the revelation of God in Christ, brought home to the mind and hearts of His first disciples by the Holy Spirit, that inspired them to holy living, to heroic deeds, to effective preaching, and later to do the writing which has come down to us in the New Testament. Without this revelation there could have been no such inspiration—no such mental illumination and spiritual exaltation—as they possessed and as they manifested in what they said, what they did, what they wrote and what they were. Again, the recognition of this distinction will help to free us from bondage to the letter, which killeth, and enable us to see beyond the letter the life through which God has spoken, and which is larger than any human speech. Then we shall cease to be troubled about little verbal differences and alleged discrepancies between the various records of the events in the life of Jesus, because the revelation itself was larger than any literary record of it. Not even yet, after nearly twenty centuries of study, under the tuition of the Holy Spirit, has the Church exhausted the riches

The Literature of the New Testament

of that revelation of God in Christ Jesus.

We can not be too grateful for the record that has come down to us in the Gospels of Christ's life and character, of His doctrine and deeds; nor for the record of what followed His resurrection and ascension in the work of the Holy Spirit through the apostles, prophets and teachers of the early Church. But we can not understand these writings properly until we come to recognize their relation to the revelation made in Jesus Christ. A recent author has expressed the true relation, as we conceive it, between Christ and not only the New Testament, but the whole Bible, in answering the question, "Does the Bible give us Christ, or does Christ give us the Bible?" He says: "Christ gives us the Bible. The Old Testament came into existence because of the revelation that was preparatory to Christ, and the New because of Christ Himself. If there had been no Christ, there would have been no Christian Bible. If there were no Bible, Christ would still be what He is, and men could be saved by Him. He was effectively at work among men before the New Testament was written to show Him forth, and out of His effective saving work the New Testament itself

Helps to Faith

proceeded. Christ, who is indispensable to Christianity, gives us the Bible, which is of inestimable value to Christianity; or, Christ, who is Christianity, gives us the Bible, which teaches us Christianity. Yet this very statement implies that in another sense the Bible gives us Christ. It informs us concerning Him. It was written and preserved that we might know Him and God through Him. It is His servant, and we owe to it our most effective knowledge respecting His historical reality and significance. Only in this character is the Bible rightly understood. * * * * *

“Christianity is not a book-religion, but a life-religion. It centers in a person and consists in a life, and the scriptures are its servant, not its source. To treat it, in proclaiming it or defending it, as a book-religion is to resign one of its best points of advantage.”*

Some may doubt the statement that “if there were no Bible, Christ would still be what He is, and men could be saved by Him.” There is no question but that Christianity would have become much more corrupt than it is if it had depended upon tradition alone to perpetuate itself in the world, for the Scriptures are the rule

* “Outline of Christian Theology,” page 21.

The Literature of the New Testament

by which all reformations are effected. And yet it is difficult indeed to believe that the story of Christ, once it was lodged in the hearts of men, would ever have perished from the earth or have lost its saving power. In any event we can not too highly prize these sacred writings regarded as the record, by Spirit-guided men, of those revelations which precede, and reach their culmination in, Christ, and of the wonderful results which flowed from that revelation, as seen in this New Testament literature.

XVII

IS REVELATION CONTINUOUS?

We have seen, thus far, that the results of the Holy Spirit's work in the Christian dispensation have been the Christian experience, the Christian Church and the Christian Scriptures, and these in the order named. The work of producing the Christian experience in new converts we know is continuous. The gospel is as much the power of God unto salvation to-day as it was in the first century, and the Holy Spirit, through that gospel, is still convincing men of sin, of righteousness and of the judgment. The work of establishing new congregations of Christians is also continuous. The very same reasons that led the earliest converts into association with each other, in local communities, lead them into such association to-day. Why, then, does not the work of increasing the New Testament Scriptures continue? If the Holy Spirit continues in the Church, why have we not a right to expect Him to inspire men to write additional sacred works for the New Testament canon? Did

Is Revelation Continuous?

revelation cease with the earthly ministry of Jesus, and inspiration with the last of the apostles?

These are questions which have been stumbling-blocks in the way of honest faith, and this is the only reason why we deal with them here. We shall be grateful if we may be able to throw any light upon questions which have perplexed so many minds. It does not follow, by any means, that if the Holy Spirit abides in the Church we are to expect that His activities will continue to take the same form which they did in the apostolic age. If we bear in mind the distinction which we have tried to make clear between the revelation of God in Christ, and the subsequent record of that revelation in the New Testament Scriptures, it will help us to see why revelation, in the sense of a direct manifestation of God in history and life, and inspiration, in the sense of the spiritual impulse and guidance which led to the record of that revelation, are not continuous. It is no arbitrary break in the continuity of God's purpose. Why should God reveal Himself again in the person of His Son, seeing that the revelation through Christ was full and complete? Why should there be a continuous or repeated record of the revelation

Helps to Faith

which was completed during the ministry of Christ? These questions answer themselves and indicate very clearly why the Christian revelation, being made in a Person, was completed in Christ, and why inspiration, regarded as the spiritual qualification or divine impulse for recording this revelation, was limited to the apostolic age.

And yet while thus guarding against the error of modern pretenders who claim to receive direct revelations from God, but whose claims are discredited by the character of the revelations they profess to receive, let us be careful, on the other hand, not to fall into the opposite error of supposing that the Holy Spirit has completed His work in the Church and in revealing truth to men. Nothing is more clearly taught in the New Testament than the continuous presence in the heart of individual believers and in the Church, of the Holy Spirit, who is to "take of the things of Christ" and show them unto us; in other words, to make real to us the great truths contained in Christ's revelation. To deny the truth of this proposition is to contradict each man's individual conscious experience, and the lessons of history. Every true Christian is conscious of growing into a

Is Revelation Continuous?

clearer and larger apprehension of truth, and especially of a growing appreciation of Christ, and of the redemption which we have in Him. This growth is either the result of our unaided human intellects, or of the quickening and guiding power of the Holy Spirit acting through our mental and moral natures. The latter view is the only one that harmonizes either with the Scriptures or with our own experience.

We see the same results when we read the history of the Church as a whole, and find how it has passed from one phase of belief to another, outgrowing an old theory and laying it aside, and taking up a new one, and, ultimately, a truer and larger one, and ever advancing toward a larger measure of truth and a more scriptural faith. Sometimes this progress has been gradual and almost imperceptible, while at other times distinct reforms have been inaugurated under the leadership of men of spiritual insight and understanding, which have marked a radical change in religious beliefs and practices. How can we account for these religious reformations in the Church, including that of the nineteenth century, without attributing the impulse which led to their inauguration, to the Holy Spirit? It is impossible to

Helps to Faith

study these phenomena in the history of the Church without recognizing the presence and power of the Spirit of truth leading ever onward to a truer apprehension of Christ and to a larger and a more loyal faith in Him. What is this but the fulfillment of Christ's promise to His disciples to be with them "always, even to the end of the world"?

We can not in this connection forbear giving a somewhat extended quotation from a recent work to which we feel much indebted for its clear statements on many of the great problems of Christian theology: "Did the life and work of Christ complete the Christian revelation? In one sense, Yes; in another sense, No. The direct personal manifestation of God in human life was made once for all in Christ, and completed. But the revelation had still to be made effective in individual men and in the larger life of man, else God would not be actually known by means of it, and it would miss the aim of revelation. Christ the revealer and God the revealed must be made inwardly known to those for whose sake the manifestation had been undertaken; the revelation must be carried to their inner life and be made real in their experience. Thus Paul says (Gal. 1:16), 'It pleased

Is Revelation Continuous?

God to reveal His Son in me.' So 2 Cor. 4:6. The agent in this work is the Holy Spirit, and the results are the Christian experience and the spiritual Church. This is what Christ promised (John 16:14), 'He shall glorify me; for he shall take of mine, and shall show it unto you.'

"Is this revelation? Certainly it is, though of course not in the same sense with that in which we say that God was revealed in the person of Christ. If we deny that this is revelation, we shall have to define revelation in external fashion, and find some other name for God's actual becoming-known to His creatures. This is not new revelation of additional matter, but it is the completing of Christ's revealing action. Christ reveals God, and the Holy Spirit reveals Christ to those whom His revelation was intended to benefit. The two works are parts of one process of becoming-known on God's part, and both are elements in His revelation. The work of the Holy Spirit is continuous until now, and is still a revealing work, though not in the independent sense in which the work of Christ was a revealing work. The living Spirit still reveals in men the Son of God who reveals the Father. So new is Christ to men that this often seems like fresh revealing;

Helps to Faith

and so inexhaustible is Christ that He often becomes known in aspects that have not been discerned before.”*

There is no danger, then, that we shall ever outgrow the New Testament. The men who under God were the authors of these inspired writings were so near to Christ, were so exalted in thought and in spiritual power by His revelations, and were so filled with the Spirit, that what they wrote has stood the test of all the intervening centuries. It was an age of creative power and energy in the Church; a period of time lifted into perpetual prominence above preceding and succeeding ages by the personal presence of the Son of God, revealing the Father in His life, doctrine and deeds. All the progress hitherto made by the Church and all that is likely to be made in the future will never render obsolete these incomparable writings; but under the illuminating power of that same divine Spirit which enabled these holy men of old to produce these writings, there is much new truth contained therein to be revealed to men as they shall be lifted to heights where they will be able to apprehend it. In this fact lies our hope for the growing unity of the

* “An Outline of Christian Theology,” pp. 15, 16.

Is Revelation Continuous?

Church and the ultimate falling away of all division walls which have hindered the fellowship and co-operation of God's people in the work of the world's evangelization.

Let us believe that there are heights of truth which human thought has never yet scaled, as well as profound depths which have never yet been explored. We know that this is true in nature; why not in revelation? God has revealed Himself in nature as well as in revelation, for the heavens declare His glory and the earth is full of the riches of His knowledge. How much we have learned about God from a better understanding of nature since the days of the apostles! Nature was then, substantially, what it is now, and revelation, objectively considered, was then what it is now; but in each case what vast progress has been made by the human mind in understanding this two-fold revelation of God! But truth has not yet been exhausted, and revelation, in the sense of coming to a clearer apprehension and inward realization of truth, will continue until we come to that fullness of knowledge in which "we shall know even as we are known."

XVIII

CHRISTIANITY VINDICATED BY HISTORY

WE have now traced the self-revelation of God through its progressive unfoldings, and have pointed out some of the principal results of this revelation as seen in the individual and collective life of man. We have seen how this revelation of God in its various stages has adapted itself to the needs of men in every age, and how the Spirit of God, working through believing and obedient hearts with its creative energy, has given and is giving birth to religious movements, agencies and instrumentalities for the furtherance of the kingdom of God. Before closing this affirmative treatment of our subject it would seem pertinent to inquire what influence history has had upon the extraordinary claims made by Christ. Have these claims been refuted or confirmed by the testimony of history?

Jesus claimed to be the "Light of the World." This can mean nothing less than that He embodied in His own life and teaching ultimate

Christianity Vindicated by History

truth as concerns God, and man's relations to Him, or in the realm of morality and religion. Has the intellectual and moral progress of mankind reached a point of development from which it must look backward to the authority of Jesus and to His doctrine? Have the nineteen centuries of Christian progress developed any imperfections in the character or teaching of Jesus? These questions must be answered in the negative by all thoughtful, candid men. No one has the presumption to claim that he knows a morality or a religion that is superior to that exemplified in the life of Jesus. When we consider the time in which Jesus lived, and the people among whom he lived and labored, and the limitations which these conditions imposed on every other man of His time, this fact becomes most significant in its evidential value. To the claim of Jesus to be the "Light of the World," the Muse of History responds, "Yes, thou Prophet of Galilee, thou hast been the Light of the World. Where Thy light has shone, human life has taken on new meaning and dignity, and civilization has taken a forward stride. But in the absence of Thy light the world abides in darkness."

Jesus said, "I am the Bread of life." Do

Helps to Faith

these nineteen centuries of history show that He can satisfy the heart-hunger of men? Let the millions of those who have tested His religion, answer the question. There is a hunger of the mind for truth, and a hunger of the heart for love and for communion with God, which only Jesus Christ has been able to satisfy. Those who have drunk deepest of the water of life which He offers have realized the deepest satisfactions of mind and heart. They ask nothing better, they can conceive of nothing higher, than that which Christ has given to them and promises to give, in increasing measure, as they are able to receive it.

Jesus said that He came that men "might have life and that they might have it more abundantly." What is the testimony of history concerning the effects of His teaching, of His religion, upon the lives of men? Is it not this, that the highest types of character which the world has known have been those which have been most nearly conformed to the character of Christ, and that these are they who have drunk most deeply of His spirit? Not only is His character the highest ideal known to men, but His religion is the only power that can enable men to realize, in any

Christianity Vindicated by History

worthy degree, that high ideal. This is the witness of all history as to the influence of the religion of Jesus Christ on the lives of men.

But Jesus established a kingdom, and taught men how to live in relation with each other as well as with God. He laid down certain fundamental principles that should govern the actions of men in their relations with each other, and taught His disciples to pray that God's will, as taught by Him, might be done on earth as it is done in heaven. What is the verdict of history as to the effect of these principles on human society and government? It is undoubtedly to the effect that, in so far as these principles have been actually applied to human relationships, they have vindicated their divine claims by the beneficent results which they have produced. It is a matter of profound regret that these principles which Christ taught have had so little practical application in the spheres of government, commerce, industry and even in the Church which He founded. Sufficient application, however, has been made of His teaching to show, incontestably, that if they were perfectly followed by men in all the relations of life there would immediately dawn

Helps to Faith

the "new heaven and the new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness."

It is not difficult to trace the wonderful growth in democracy back to its source in the teaching and life of Jesus, who exalted the dignity of man, put the human soul into direct relation with God as Father, and laid supremè emphasis upon man's moral and spiritual nature. It is this conception of the value of man, and the sacredness of his nature, that has overthrown despotisms and tyrannies, and has given to the common people an increasing share in the privileges and benefits of governments. To this same teaching, as illustrated in Jesus' own life, we are indebted for all those philanthropic and benevolent movements and institutions which have for their purpose the caring for the weak, unfortunate and defective classes of society. These do not exist where the influence of Christ has not gone and inspired the hearts of the people with altruistic and unselfish aims.

In the midst of a world of mortals Jesus proclaimed Himself as "the Resurrection and the Life." Has His religion succeeded in opening up the life beyond to the view of faith, and in delivering men from the bondage of the fear of

Christianity Vindicated by History

death? Does it have power to shed the glory of the immortal life upon the life that now is, and to redeem it from drudgery and dreariness? Let history again furnish the answer from the army of Christian martyrs who have gone to the stake, to wild beasts, and to the fires of martyrdom, singing songs of triumph. Let it gather its proofs from the death-beds of dying Christians whose faces have been radiant with "the light that never shone on sea or land," and whose last utterances have been words of cheer and hope. Let the lives of unnumbered thousands of humble, faithful Christians, living lives of toil and sacrifice here, and rejoicing in the hope of the glory of God to be revealed in them hereafter, answer the question.

Surely history has vindicated the claims of Jesus Christ, and its pages of Christian heroism and of Christian progress furnish the highest proofs that the religion which He taught was made for man, is adapted to man, and should be accepted by all men as God's highest gift to the race.

PART II

Some Obstacles to Faith

I

OBJECTIONS CLASSIFIED

WE have now reached a point in our discussion where we may take up the second feature of our work, as outlined in our preliminary statement, namely, the removal of certain obstacles which have stood in the way of faith and have caused many to stumble into skepticism and infidelity. In dealing with this part of our subject, we need not go back to theories and doctrines which have long since become obsolete and have ceased to exert any influence whatever upon present-day thought. We may content ourselves with examining some of the more prominent of those doctrinal stumbling-blocks which even to-day are hindrances in the way of honest inquirers after the truth. Some of these may be obsolescent, but they are not wholly obsolete. It will hardly be possible for us to treat the questions which we are now to consider without treading upon controverted ground, but our purpose will be to deal with all such questions in an irenic spirit and with the sole aim of removing causes of honest doubt.

Helps to Faith

These obstacles divide themselves into two classes: First, those which consist of objections made by unbelievers, through their misconception of scriptural teaching, and, second, those false or partial views of the Bible which believers have put forth as matters of faith and as necessary for one to believe. We do not know which class of obstacles has done most to hinder faith, but we are inclined to the opinion that Christianity has suffered more from its professed friends than from its avowed enemies. The enemies of Christianity have made effective use of the false or inadequate theories and doctrines of its professed friends. They do not stop to discriminate between Christianity as taught in the New Testament, and Christianity as represented by the doctrines and commandments of men. Many men classed as infidels in past centuries received their reputation as such from protesting against or ridiculing doctrines, dogmas, superstitions and practices which find no authority in the New Testament. These men were probably made infidels because they identified this false teaching and practice with Christianity itself. If religionists had always been careful to discriminate between the essential facts and truths of

Objections Classified

Christianity, on the one hand, and their metaphysical hair-splitting and doctrinal speculations on the other, their false teaching would not have proved so serious an obstacle in the way of faith. But this is what your religious dogmatist never does. He evermore identifies his interpretations of the Bible, and his peculiar views, with the truth itself, and it is this fact that has made his teaching so hurtful to faith.

II

ORIGIN OF MORAL EVIL

Let us concern ourselves first with that class of misconceptions which affect the character of God. Since God, according to certain teachings, has "predestinated whatever comes to pass," why did He introduce moral evil into the world, to work out all the misery and wretchedness which we see following in its train? This has been an important part of the stock in trade of unbelievers from time immemorial, but it has received fresh cogency from certain creeds which have furnished these objectors their major premise. Many honest minds have been unable to discriminate between the foreknowledge and foreordination of God, and since they can not deny that God must have foreseen man's sin, they do not see how to escape the conclusion that he ordained that man should sin. A very important fact which even many theologians have overlooked, and which we can hardly expect unbelievers to recognize, is the creation of man in God's image, involving, among other things, a free will, or with a

Origin of Moral Evil

will, as we might say, for without the element of freedom it would not be will. If God created man a free, self-determining personality, with power to choose the right or the wrong, then it ought to be clear that moral evil came into the world through the abuse of this moral freedom.

If it be said that God should have made man without the power to commit sin, the obvious answer is that in so making him He would have deprived him, at the same time, of the power to do right; that is, he would have made a machine and not a man. God wanted a being as the crown of His creative work in the world who would love and obey him from choice, and He could create such a being only by endowing him with the sublime prerogative of choice. God's father-heart must have yearned for the existence of beings in His own image, capable of loving Him and entering into fellowship with Him. Hence He made man with a mind to understand, a heart to love, and a will to choose. No doubt He foresaw that sin would result from this freedom of choice, but He must have foreseen, also, that out of this moral freedom there would come at last a redeemed humanity that would vindicate the wisdom of His action in creating man in His own image.

Helps to Faith

This is the true ground for a rational optimism.

Man sins from his own free choice. No theology or philosophy can overthrow that fact. Every man's conscience is a witness against him, that when he sinned he did so from choice. He could have done otherwise. When our acts result from compulsion, we have no consciousness of sin. It is only when we have the power to do right and choose to do wrong, that our consciences condemn us. The remorse that follows sin grows out of the consciousness that we yielded to the lower when we ought to have yielded to the higher motive. There is nothing in the Bible to controvert these facts of human experience. On the contrary the biblical record is but a transcript of our personal experiences. The difficulty has not come from the teaching of the Bible on this subject, but from false theologies and philosophies which have not been true to the facts of human experience and to the laws of human nature.

God's character for goodness, then, is not impeached by this view of the origin of moral evil. No sane man thinks of blaming the Almighty for creating him a free moral agent with the power to choose his own destiny, instead of making him a mere machine, acting

Origin of Moral Evil

only as he is acted upon by external force. Every one who thinks rightly on this subject feels a lasting debt of gratitude and of obligation to God for having endowed him with the power of choosing, making it possible for him to choose the right, to pursue the right, and, if need be, to suffer for the right, that he may at last inherit the crown of righteousness. Especially is this true in view of the fact that, through the gift of His Son, God has made it possible for sinful men to overcome the evil that is within and without them, and to attain, ultimately, to moral and spiritual perfection.

Instead, therefore, of finding a stumbling-block in the way of faith in the existence of moral evil in the world, we find in it and in the cause which led to it the highest possible incentive to faith, seeing that it is through the power of faith that we are united to God and receive strength for overcoming our sins and attaining at last to the perfect freedom of the redeemed children of God. So we shall find that many of these so-called obstacles to faith may become stepping-stones to a higher and truer faith, as well as to a clearer and better understanding of God's ways with men.

III

ELECTION

If the doctrine of election had no standing whatever in scripture, it could not have held sway over the minds of so many men through so many centuries. There is a scriptural doctrine of election, but it has been perverted and its meaning and spirit have been so changed as to justify its classification here among the obstacles to faith. In its perverted form it represents God as having elected from all eternity those who are to be saved, without any reference whatever to man's choice in the matter, or to any moral condition in man disposing him to seek salvation. It is conceived to be based wholly on God's sovereignty, and man's free agency has no part in determining his election or non-election. The number of persons thus elected to salvation is so definitely fixed that it can be neither increased nor diminished. All others, not chosen by arbitrary decree of God, were said to be passed by and permitted to suffer the wrath of God through eternal ages for the glory of God's sovereignty.

Election

It is true that this doctrine has been modified, to some extent, in recent times, but that it is yet a stumbling-block in the way of faith can not be doubted. It is an imputation upon God's character, which can not stand in the light of the revelation of Jesus Christ, in which God's fatherhood is fundamental. That any true father could select some of his children to be greatly blessed and favored, while others were doomed to endless torment through no fault of their own, but because the father so willed it, is incredible. Jesus reasoned from the human to the divine fatherhood when He said, "If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him?" From this process of reasoning we are clearly justified in asking, "If you, earthly fathers, know how to treat your children impartially, and your moral sense would resent the policy of favoring some and of imposing great hardships and privations upon others, and that without any reference to the character of your children, how much more does your Father in heaven know how to treat those whom He has created in His own image, on principles of equity and fatherly compassion,

Helps to Faith

disdaining any partiality of treatment or respect of persons to promote His own glory and to manifest His imperial sovereignty?" The conclusion is inevitable that the doctrine of election, as it has been taught in the creeds, is utterly inconsistent with the revelation of Jesus Christ, as it relates to God's fatherhood. That it is also out of harmony with the tenor of New Testament teaching, that Christ died for all, that all men everywhere are commanded to repent, that God is no respecter of persons, but that whosoever will may drink of the water of life, freely, is sufficiently evident not to require any argument to make it more manifest.

The New Testament doctrine of election is based on that of the Old Testament. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Joshua, and the prophets, were all elect men chosen by God for special service. So Israel was an elect race, chosen for a special mission in carrying out God's purposes toward the whole world. It is the right of God to elect such men and such nations as may seem wise to Him, for the carrying out of His gracious plans, which Paul vindicates in the Roman letter. (Chaps. IX-XI). It is easy to see how this same principle would be applied to the Christian calling. "Like Israel,

Election

the Christian people are chosen of God for the good of the world. Instead of holding that the elect are the only ones that can be saved, it is more accordant with the scriptures to hold that the elect are elect for the sake of the non-elect—that is, they are chosen by God to serve for the saving of those who have not been brought to God as they have been. The non-elect in God's own time may become elect." To this sound statement by a recent Calvinistic author we would add that "God's own time" is when they shall hear the gospel of God's grace, which is the divine call to repentance and newness of life. "Now is the accepted time; now is the day of salvation." Those who heed this divine call are God's elect. They have accepted Him whom God has chosen to be the Savior of men. These are exhorted to make their "calling and election sure." Christian election is not without human choice. The colored brother was right who did not believe that his master belonged to the elect, because he had never heard of his being a candidate. Election to salvation is never thrust upon a soul against its will. Moreover, the Christian who comes to think he is elect for his own sake, instead of being saved for service in saving others, has

Helps to Faith

made the same mistake as did the Jews, God's ancient elect people, and must suffer the same fate—ultimate rejection.

There is no doubt a great doctrine of predestination taught in the New Testament, but it is not that of predestinating certain persons to salvation and others to condemnation. Paul speaks of God's "eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Eph. 3:11). In another place he declares this purpose to be "to sum up all things in Christ, the things in the heavens and the things upon the earth." The salvation and unification of the race was God's purpose in Christ Jesus. It is also His purpose that those who believe in Christ shall be conformed to the image of Christ. He has foreordained that. (Rom. 8:29). Christ is the ideal, the divine pattern, which God has had in mind from the beginning, into whose image it is His "eternal purpose" to bring all men who will accept the salvation offered in the gospel. This is a predestination which invites, but does not force, our free wills.

This rational doctrine of election, which is the New Testament doctrine, offers no obstacle in the way of faith. It relieves God of the imputation of partiality and arbitrariness, which

Election

was involved in the old doctrine as it is written in the creeds, and makes it harmonize with God's character as Father, and with man's nature as a free moral agent. It also removes an excuse which many have been making for not becoming Christians—namely, that God's election robs them of any individual responsibility in the matter of their salvation, seeing that the number of the elect is unalterably fixed by a decree of God. It places the responsibility for being non-elect, where it properly belongs,—on those who, having heard the gospel, refuse to accept its glad message and surrender their lives to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Thus the doctrine of election becomes a call to faith rather than an obstacle.

IV

SIN, SALVATION, RETRIBUTION

THE objection which has been raised against the prevailing views on the above subjects, which we have classed together because of their intimate relation, is that they are arbitrary, artificial, and out of harmony with that divine order which we see everywhere manifest in the universe. It has been too often assumed that the popular teaching on these subjects is the teaching of the scriptures, and that, therefore, the Bible is not a reliable source of information on religious questions. Men of skeptical views are often the slowest to note the progress of religious thought in those who may justly be called representative men of the Church, and are found waging war against the Bible for teaching doctrines which have long since been left behind by its most thoughtful friends.

We need not here enter into what the theologians of the past called "original sin," which was supposed to cleave to all Adam's posterity, inherited guilt or total hereditary depravity, further than to say that no theologian who has

Sin, Salvation, Retribution

the ear of the public to-day, holds to these doctrines as they were once stated and believed. Adam and Eve fell, as all their descendants have fallen, by yielding to the solicitations to evil or subordinating the higher to the lower, and thus disobeying God. We have seen this tragedy going on before our eyes, and have known its reality in our own personal experiences. Adam's posterity inherited, not Adam's sin or his guilt, but a morally depraved nature with its tendency to sin. Sin is man's own voluntary act, whereby he disobeys God speaking through his conscience or his moral judgment. It is choosing the lower in preference to the higher, and subordinating the will of God to one's own will. It is separating oneself from God, who is the source of life, and thus entering upon a course whose end is death.

There have been created many artificial sins, growing out of artificial ecclesiastical regulations, which have done much to obscure the real meaning and awful nature of sin as it is revealed to us in the scriptures and especially in the life, teaching and death of Jesus Christ. Impurity is best revealed by purity, darkness by light, and sin by holiness. It is the white light of Christ's life and character that reveals

Helps to Faith

the awful blackness of the world's sin and its dire need of salvation. Measured by his life, selfishness, covetousness, hatred of men, pride, impurity of heart and unbelief are the great sins which ruin the soul and produce strife and wretchedness in society. The opposites of the virtues emphasized in the beatitudes are, in Christ's thought, the chief sins from which men need to be saved. Hence they that are proud in spirit, that are satisfied with themselves and have no sense of demerit, the haughty and ambitious, with no aspirations after a better, purer life, the cruel and hard-hearted, the impure in heart, the strife-makers, those who take care to be on the popular side rather than on the right side, and hence are never persecuted for righteousness' sake—these are the chief sinners and most unlike the citizens of His kingdom.

Salvation is the attainment of those characteristics which become citizens of a heavenly kingdom. In a word, it is becoming Christlike. The church is an institution—a school—for helping those who enter it to attain Christlike characters. To it are to be added those—and only those—who are in process of being saved. There is a more limited sense in which the

Sin, Salvation, Retribution

word *saved* is sometimes used in the New Testament, as indicating the state of those who have changed their attitude to Christ from that of rebellion or indifference to discipleship, accepting Him as Lord, and receiving forgiveness of past sins. But the broader meaning of the word includes the whole spiritual process by which the sinner is brought into reconciliation with God and into the moral image of His Son. An inadequate view of what salvation means is at the bottom of much of the religious indifference manifested by church members. The same inadequate conception of the great salvation offered to men by Christ, has resulted in a vagueness of teaching on the part of the church which does not tend to develop specific traits of character as an essential part of that salvation. A word must suffice here, where a volume might be written. Why does not the church take on more of the character of a school and train its members in the Christian graces until they stand as approved types of citizenship in the kingdom of God?

A rational and scriptural view of sin and salvation will correct the false and arbitrary notions of future reward and punishment. It has not been sufficiently understood that right-

Helps to Faith

eousness of character carries its reward with it, by putting man in right relations with God, and opening up to him all the possibilities of development, thus enabling him to achieve a noble destiny; and that sin contains within it the seeds which produce the ultimate harvest of corruption and death. No profounder word has ever been uttered on this subject than that spoken by Paul: "Be not deceived: God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." This is the great law of cause and effect which holds sway in the spiritual as well as in the physical realm. Retribution is as certain in its operation as gravitation. Indeed, it is gravitation in the moral world. Judas "went to his own place," not by any arbitrary appointment of God, but under the operation of the law of spiritual attraction. He was reaping, and is reaping, what he had sown. Let it be clearly understood that the universe contains no heaven for the man who loves sin, and no hell for one who loves righteousness and hates iniquity. Character is destiny, and this universal law can not be evaded.

Through the initiative which God in His mercy has taken to recover man from sin, by sending His Son into the world, the sinner may

Sin, Salvation, Retribution

escape from his sins and so from the direful results of his sins. God's pardoning grace and renewing power become available to him who comes to Christ in faith and penitence, surrendering his life to His guidance, thus removing the barriers which have hitherto hindered the soul's communion with God. Now, under the operation of the same law, he sows to the Spirit and will reap everlasting life.

"May we close the door of hope to all who die impenitent?" It is not our prerogative, thank God, to close the door of hope to any soul. If God, in His infinite goodness, shall choose to give further opportunity beyond death for any soul to repent, who, for any reason, did not in this life yield to the tender pleadings of love, that would be cause for thanksgiving to Him, but it certainly would furnish no reason for less urgency on our part in calling men to repentance here. The writer, personally, has no doubt that God will meet any of His penitent children, at any time, in any world, with pardon; but the supreme danger lies in so hardening the heart by repeated refusals to accept the gospel that neither here nor there will repentance unto salvation be possible. Therefore those who promise salvation beyond death

Helps to Faith

to those who refuse it in this world go beyond what is revealed. But so, also, do they who close the door of hope to all who pass from this world without having come to the knowledge of God and of salvation through Jesus Christ. Let us neither underestimate the power of sin nor put limits to the mercy of God.

This view of sin, salvation and retribution removes all reasonable objections, and the Bible teaching on these subjects ceases to be an obstacle to faith.

V

SCIENCE AND REVELATION

ONE fundamental misconception of the scope and intent of revelation has furnished occasion for a conflict which has lasted through centuries, and which has been variously designated as "Science versus Revelation," or "Science versus Religion," or "Genesis versus Geology." This misconception has been that the Bible, being an inspired volume, must necessarily give scientifically exact and accurate information on all subjects to which it directly or incidentally refers. Since the Book of Genesis deals with the subject of creation, there must be, of necessity, according to this view, exact harmony between the theory of cosmogony held by the writer of that book and the facts of science. Hence a great deal of time and labor has been expended in trying to harmonize Genesis and geology, and to show that the inspired writer had an up-to-date view of science. On the other hand skeptics, taking the same general view of what the Bible should be and teach, have tried to invalidate its claim

Helps to Faith

to inspiration on the ground that some of its statements could not be harmonized with the conclusions of science. And so the war went on, and it is difficult to tell which side was the more dogmatic in urging its position, skeptical science or dogmatic theology.

It is sad to think how much infidelity has grown out of this discussion and how blind even the ablest theologians seemed to be for a time to the true solution of the problem. All thinking men now understand that the Bible is a record of God's revelations to men concerning Himself, His character, His will, and His gracious purpose concerning man and the way of salvation from sin, and that it is not, and does not pretend to be, a book of science, whether of astronomy, geology, ethnology, or cosmogony. Whatever statements it may make on any of these subjects are incidental to its supreme purpose. God speaks to men both through nature and through inspired history, such as we have in the Bible. It is the duty of science to understand what God has said and is saying in nature, and it is the duty of theology to find out what God has said through holy men of old, and especially through Christ. Theologians are as much bound to accept the accredited truths of science

Science and Revelation

as scientists are to accept the accredited truths of revelation. There can be no conflict, of course, between what God says in nature and in revelation. Science may misinterpret the one, as theology may the other, but this conflict does not arise from the *facts* of either, but from the misconceptions which have grown out of them.

It is indeed one of the proofs of the inspiration of the author of Genesis that, in dealing with the problem of creation he steered clear of the prevalent polytheistic ideas and false conceptions of creation which prevailed among the religions of those early times. So intent was he on his theistic purpose of presenting God as the author of all things that he had no occasion to turn aside from this lofty purpose either to overthrow prevailing conceptions of cosmogony, or to enunciate a scientific theory which must either have been in harmony with the knowledge then prevalent or wholly unintelligible. As a matter of fact he did neither, but was content to accomplish his own purpose in presenting God as the Creator of the heavens and the earth, and of all that is within them, including man as the climax of his creative work. Indeed nothing is more characteristic of the Bible than its wise silences concerning

Helps to Faith

matters which do not bear directly or indirectly upon the great truths which it desires to inculcate. Stated in their own language the purpose of the scriptures is as follows: "The law of the Lord is perfect, restoring the soul" (Psa. 19:7). "These things are written that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing ye may have life in His name" (John 20:31). "Now these things were our examples to the intent we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted" (1 Cor. 10:6). "And they were written for our admonition upon whom the ends of the ages are come" (1 Cor. 10:11). "From a babe thou hast known the sacred writings which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. Every scripture inspired of God is also profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness; that the man of God may be complete, furnished completely unto every good work" (2 Tim. 3:14-17).

Such is the Bible's account of its own purpose. Well would it have been for the Christian world if it had kept these passages in mind and had not attempted to make the Bible cover ground which it was never intended to cover.

Science and Revelation

There is no reason to doubt that the Christians of the first century shared fully the views of astronomy and of science generally, which prevailed at that time, and regarded the earth as the center of the solar system. If the Bible is to be regarded as a book of science as well as of religion, how shall this fact be accounted for? It was not by reading the Bible, but by reading the stars through a telescope, that the Ptolemaic theory of astronomy was overthrown and the Copernican theory established. So all the great scientific discoveries have been made by the study of nature, just as religious reformations have been brought about by fresh and original study of the Bible. It has been a great injustice to science that the Church, in past ages, has attempted to hold back its students from reaching conclusions which would be in supposed conflict with the Bible. Just as if anything in the Bible was worth preserving that could be overthrown by scientific discovery! It has been equally harmful to religion that both scientists and theologians have sought to stretch its authority over the domain of science. Happily for the Church a clearer view of the relation of science and revelation to each other, and of their respective fields, has

Helps to Faith

taken the place, very largely, of the view just mentioned. We hear very little in these days about the conflict between Genesis and geology and between science and religion. Science has thrown new luster on theology and religion, and in turn religion has exercised, in these later years, a most favorable influence upon science, teaching it both reverence and humility.

There are those who think that this view of the Bible lowers its value. Even if this were so we would be under obligation still to accept the truth. It is not true, however, that it lowers the Bible. On the contrary it puts it on a pedestal where it is indeed supreme and without a rival. In the domain of morals and religion, which is by far the most important, having to do with questions of eternal moment, the Bible is without a peer. It is divinely adapted to meet the deepest needs of the human soul and to qualify men for living the truest and noblest lives. By its revelation of Christ it brings men into right relations with God, gives them a true conception of life and duty, develops the best there is in human nature, calls into activity all the latent powers of the mind as well as of the heart, and so helps the race onward in all that makes up a high and pure civilization. This

Science and Revelation

is why those countries in which the Bible freely circulates and is most studied and exercises the widest influence, excel other lands in science, in art, in industry, in commerce and in all that enriches and ennobles life.

If the Bible writers had been inspired to give a scientifically correct account of the origin of the earth, and of its place in the material universe, and the law of development in plant and animal life, the Bible would have been discredited as a revelation of God and of the way of salvation because of its seemingly impossible scientific theories. Would it have been wise to have imperiled a revelation involving man's salvation in order to make known scientific theories for which the world was not prepared?

There is no longer war between science and religion. Each bears its own torch and each is contributing its share toward helping the world on to a brighter future. The God of nature is also the God of revelation, and while science is explaining His handiwork in the vast material universe, religion and its revelation are unfolding the glory of His character, the munificence of His love and the transfiguring power of His truth and grace in a redeemed humanity.

VI

REVELATION PROGRESSIVE

PERHAPS no one view of the Bible has raised more intellectual and moral difficulties to its acceptance than that which regarded and treated the various parts of it from Genesis to Revelation as standing upon the same level and possessing the same degree of inspiration and authority. Holding this view of the Bible, preachers in days gone by, and perhaps even yet in some parts of the country, could take an obscure text in the Old Testament and read into it all the fullness of the revelation that came through Christ, or all the doctrinal speculations which have been based upon such revelation. With that conception of revelation, preachers are as likely to go to the Psalms or to Genesis to learn the terms of salvation under Christ as to the New Testament. They also feel under the same obligation to justify every utterance in the Old Testament as perfectly expressing the mind of God as they would in making such claim for any utterance of Christ or His apostles. Such a view ignores dispensa-

Revelation Progressive

tional lines, the time, place and authorship of the various books and the whole idea of a progressive revelation.

The author of the Hebrew letter, in the beginning of his great argument for the superiority of Christianity to Judaism, says: "God, having of old time spoken unto the fathers in the prophets by divers portions and in divers manners, hath at the end of these days spoken unto us in His Son." Here is a fundamental distinction which had come to be very largely overlooked until the religious reformers of the nineteenth century called attention to the distinction between the Old Testament and the New Testament, the old dispensation and the new dispensation, the law given by Moses and the grace and truth given by Jesus Christ. This distinction has enabled these reformers to solve many of the problems which had hitherto stood in the way of a clear understanding of the Bible, and to have a much clearer appreciation of the distinctive character of Christianity. The whole argument of this Hebrew letter is based on the assumption that God's revelation in His Son must, in the very nature of things, be superior to that which has been made unto the fathers in the prophets. If the reader will

Helps to Faith

remember the point made in a previous chapter—that revelation is largely through life and character—it will be readily seen how it is that God has spoken his highest and best message in His Son, whose life and character were a perfect revelation of the Father. It is absolutely impossible to have an intelligent view of the book we call the Bible without bearing these facts in mind.

How often do we meet with people who are troubled because of some statement in what are called the imprecatory Psalms, or in other parts of the Old Testament, recording acts of God's ancient people who claimed to be acting under the authority of God, which do not seem to them to breathe the spirit of the New Testament. Of course they do not breathe the same spirit. Why should it be expected that the writers and the warriors of those ancient times, with their imperfect conceptions of God, and in the absence of that Christian culture which Christianity alone imparts, should manifest the pure and lofty spirit which breathes in the New Testament writings? Here, then, is the key that unlocks many of these hard problems: God could only reveal Himself to men as men were able to receive His revelation. He had to

Revelation Progressive

deal with the race in its infancy as with children, giving them a few primary ideas and advancing to higher truths as they were able to receive them. "Revelation was progressive, advancing from partial beginnings to the fullness that appeared in Christ and was unfolded by the Spirit. Revelation was educational; that is to say, God was seeking actually to impart knowledge of Himself, so that men would possess it. Therefore revelation was, by necessity, progressive, as all educational processes must be. Men had first to be taught almost as children, who must have training adapted to their state. God brought in higher truth as rapidly as man could learn to act upon it: in fact he was always in advance of man, and chargeable rather with haste than with needless delay. His prophets were always far ahead of the people whom they taught, and fresh messages always came in before the hearers had mastered the earlier ones, or were ready to turn the new ones into action. With eagerness and with self-restraint, God was constantly pressing on to self-expression, regulating His movement according to the condition and capacity of men."*

* Clarke's "Outline of Christian Theology," pp. 31, 32.

Helps to Faith

Had this truth been sufficiently understood by the religious teachers of the past it would have saved many honest inquirers from stumbling into skepticism. By their false method of seeking to honor the Scriptures they dishonored Christ and placed insuperable obstacles in the way of faith to men of honest doubt. Some of the writers in the Old Testament reached the sublime heights of spiritual exaltation in which they saw and uttered truth for all time. Others wrote from a much lower plane and their inadequate knowledge of God—inadequate for our day—is clearly manifest in the light of Christ's revelation. We must give the Bible its true perspective if we would appreciate its marvelous variety and understand the myriad voices by which it speaks to us. The indiscriminate way in which the Bible is quoted is illustrated in a current number of a popular magazine which begins an article with the statement: "It is a saying of inspired wisdom that 'all that a man hath will he give for his life.'"—the words of Satan recorded in the book of Job! It is a bad use of the Bible to make it an authority for the truth of what Satan declared.

It is not our purpose to apply this principle of progressive revelation to the solution of the

Revelation Progressive

numerous problems which have arisen out of the Old Testament, but having stated the principle, it is better to leave each reader to apply it for himself when he meets with the difficulty which requires its application. We are sure, however, that the Bible will become a much more interesting and intelligible book when we read it in the light of this truth, and its appeal to our faith becomes all the more irresistible. Some have likened revelation to a stream which begins in a small rivulet, increasing in volume as it moves forward until it becomes a mighty river floating the commerce of a continent. Others have called the patriarchal, Jewish and Christian dispensations, with their respective revelations, the starlight, moonlight and sunlight periods of the world. Both these figures imply the truth we are here insisting on, that revelation has been progressive, reaching its sublime culmination in Jesus Christ, and that He is therefore the supreme arbiter of all questions pertaining to the will and character of God, and whatever will not stand the test of the mind of Christ must be reckoned as imperfect. Every utterance of psalmist, prophet or law-giver of the Old Testament must be submitted to the mind of Christ as the determinative

Helps to Faith

factor in all questions of morals and religion. Nothing less than this is Christianity pure and simple.

The church has been slow in learning the lesson taught on the Mount of Transfiguration. The presence of Moses and Elijah, law-giver and prophet of ancient Israel, who laid their legal and prophetic honors at the feet of the divine Prophet and Lawgiver, only symbolized what the voice of God declared from "the excellent glory." "This is my beloved Son: hear ye him." It was the revelation, in most sublime imagery, of the great truth, that the Son of God transcends, by his wisdom and authority, all previous messengers of God, and is the World's Supreme Teacher and Spiritual Lawgiver.

VII

ABUSE OF AUTHORITY IN RELIGION

ONE of the striking features of modern times is the growth of the feeling of personal freedom and the disposition to rebel against any form of government that is imposed from above and does not originate within the people. This is characteristic not of our own country alone, but of all civilized lands. Democracy in government, which means that the government must originate with the people and not come down from a king or an aristocracy, has made wonderful strides in modern times. Science, too, has contributed its share toward breaking the shackles of authority, and fostering the sense of individual freedom.

It is not strange, therefore, that there is a disposition, widespread in these modern times, against authority in religion in the form in which it has usually been presented to men. In his recent work on "The Religion of a Mature Mind," George Albert Coe, speaking of the freedom which prevails elsewhere, says: "Rightly or wrongly, there is a somewhat gen-

Helps to Faith

eral feeling among intelligent men that Christianity, at least in its official garb, grants no corresponding freedom. In the other factors of civilization the individual is a source, but in religion he feels that he is required to be a mere point of application for something that takes its start outside him. He has no initiative, he can only comply. If he ventures to think outside the limits which he believes are set for him by the Church, he suffers a sense of alienation from his fellows, and feels that he must classify himself with heretics and unbelievers. Men are assuming, for apparently trivial causes, that they are Ishmaelites in religious thought, and the reason of it, at least in part, is the astonishing ease with which many persons, under the impression that they are keeping the faith, treat as an enemy any individual who wanders from the herd." (Pp. 74, 75).

No matter where we lay the blame for this feeling, no true observer of the times will deny that it is widespread and that it is growing rather than waning. It has come to be a serious obstacle to faith with many, and the subject deserves the careful and candid consideration of those who believe in Christ and are seeking to

Abuse of Authority in Religion

make his religion universal. How shall we deal with the problem? We know how Roman Catholicism deals with it, by presenting the authority of an infallible Church and an infallible pope, beyond which there is no appeal. We know how the early reformers of the sixteenth century undertook to solve the problem, by presenting the authority of an infallible book against that of an infallible Church. We know, too, how soon this appeal to an infallible book very naturally assumed the form of authoritative creeds formulated by fallible men and made the criteria and the bases of Christian fellowship. By this process divine authority came to be mere ecclesiastical authority which, however, was imposed upon the consciences of men as if it were the authority of God, pure and simple.

What we mean, therefore, by the abuse of authority in religion, is the attempt on the part of men to formulate a theological system from the Bible, and to impose that system upon the consciences of men as authoritative. We may have the same abuse of authority, in kind, by an unwritten creed or set of doctrines which are made tests of fellowship on the plea that they are of divine authority. There is no dis-

Helps to Faith

tion, in principle, between a written and an unwritten human creed, when they are alike regarded as of divine authority and are made tests of fellowship. There will always be persons who, "under the impression that they are keeping the faith," will "treat as an enemy any individual who wanders from the herd," or dares to hold an opinion on any religious subject different from that entertained by the great majority of his brethren. These, whether contending for articles of a written or an unwritten creed, are presenting serious obstacles to faith and to the progress of Christianity.

What shall we say, then? Is there no authority in religion? Most certainly there is. It was characteristic of Jesus' teaching that "he spake as one having authority and not as the scribes." But Jesus spake with the authority of truth, and not with the authority of the Sanhedrin or of any ecclesiastical deliverance. He appealed to the moral nature of man, and the moral nature in man has always recognized the authority of his teaching whether it obeyed it or not. To quote again from Mr. Coe's work, referred to above: "According to this view, the Christ comes to me not as restraint, but as reinforcement of the inner liberty that marks

Abuse of Authority in Religion

the modern spirit. He asks me to accept nothing but what is approved by my present self. The acts that he commands can be seen to be required by my own moral standard. The doctrines that he expects me to believe can be reached by orderly procedure from what I already admit to be true. At no point does he require a break with what I am willing to own as my real self. Somewhere in my interviews with him I may discover that I have played the fool by taking for my real self some caricature of it, but yet, at whatever level of foolishness he finds me, he proceeds by unfolding something that is already there." (Pp. 77, 78).

It is not authority in religion that people object to. More, rather than less, authority should characterize the utterances of the modern pulpit. The man who speaks God's message to the human heart and conscience can speak with the authority of God, and the people do not object to this. They are quick enough to discern whether a preacher is speaking the truth of God or uttering speculative opinions of his own. There is that in man which recognizes the truth which finds him in the depths of his nature. The preacher who voices this truth may speak as one having authority and

Helps to Faith

not as the scribes. As has been well said, "there has been too much effort to coerce men by what they feel to be foreign to themselves; . . . too little of the imperative of conscience, and too little direct appeal to the instinctive needs of humanity. We have had too much compulsion and not enough impulsion." Nor does this apply, simply, to what may be called the moral teaching and the moral requirements of Christ. Every command which is clearly traceable to his authority will instantly impress itself on every obedient spirit that is seeking to do his will. Every such command, however, has its justification in the needs of human nature and its adaptation to such needs. Not one of them rests upon mere arbitrary authority.

What is really demanded, then, by the spirit of the times in which we live, is a change in the *kind* of authority which has been used in religion. Instead of the authority of the Church, or of human interpretations of the Bible, called creeds, which has been imposed upon men from without as external authority, there must be a return to Christ's method, which was to appeal to that which is *within* men and which they can not but approve by the very law of their being, and which thus certifies

Abuse of Authority in Religion

itself as truth and therefore of God. This will remove human creeds out of the realm of authority, except in so far as the truth which they contain will commend itself to every man's conscience in the sight of God, will exalt Christ to His proper place as the source of authority because He is the embodiment of truth, and will open the way for many who have been kept out of the kingdom of God by dogmatism to enter in and become loyal and free disciples of Christ.

This change is now going on, and there is danger that, in throwing off the external authority of creeds and ecclesiasticisms, many may fail to recognize the real authority which resides in Christ, and in the truth, and which is not only consonant with human freedom, but which is essential to its full realization. It is this fact which places such grave responsibility upon the pulpit and religious press of to-day, and upon all whose duty is to teach the things of the kingdom of God. Not to know the age in which we live, not to understand the deepest currents of thought, along which the Spirit of God is moving, is the very sin for which Jesus rebuked the religious people of His time. Not to recognize the change which has come over

Helps to Faith

the modern world as respects authority in religion is to fail in making effective any message we may have for it.

This modern view as respects authority in relation to one's life is well expressed by a modern author: "All life must have its law, the life of man so much the more than that of inferior beings, in that it is more precious and of nicer adjustment. This law for man is in the first place an external law, but it may become an internal law. When man has once recognized the inner law, and bowed before it, through this reverence and voluntary submission, he is ripe for liberty: so long as there is no vigorous and sovereign inner law, he is incapable of breathing its air; for he will be drunken with it, maddened, morally slain. The man who guides his life by inner law, can no more live servile to outward authority than can the full-grown bird live imprisoned in the egg-shell."*

* "The Simple Life." By Charles Wagner, p. 11.

VIII

CONVERSION—THE OLD DOCTRINE AND THE NEW LIGHT

ANY ONE who has had considerable experience in personal religious work knows that the popular and once universal conception of conversion has become a most serious obstacle in the way of many honest inquirers after the way of life and salvation. The word conversion is used here to mean the turning of man from the practice and power of sin to the love and service of God. It denotes that radical change in human life by which its energies, aspirations and efforts are turned into new channels; that is, from being directed to worldly and selfish ends, to spiritual and unselfish aims.

We speak of this change as radical because it has to do with the deepest and most controlling motives of human life. But of course the change is not equally radical in different classes of individuals. The conversion of the child, for instance, is attended by no such sudden revulsion in feeling and conduct as in the case of an adult, and even the conversion of adults

Helps to Faith

differs according to their temperament and their moral condition in life. It is not so much with the *fact* of conversion itself, as with the method by which it is brought about, that the difficulty has arisen which has become an obstacle to faith.

According to a view once almost universally prevalent, and even now by no means obsolete, man is wholly passive in the matter of his conversion. His moral condition is such, according to the theology of which this view is a part, that he could not be otherwise. Being totally depraved in mind and heart and will, he is unable to think a good thought, to love what is pure and good, or to perform a good deed. The appeal which the gospel makes to men can have no force whatever with them until they are regenerated directly by the impact of the Holy Spirit upon their spirits, thus enabling them to repent, believe and obey. When in "God's good time" He saw proper to convert a sinner He would do so without consulting him and wholly independent of his agency. Any one who takes the pains to investigate the subject will be surprised to find that this view of conversion is entertained yet by many people,

Conversion

having survived the theological system of which it is a part.

It is easy to see, however, that the growth of the scientific spirit, which is doing so much to clarify thought in every other department of life, and especially the increasing interest in psychology, would lead to an irrepressible conflict with the theory to which we have referred. To a certain class of minds it never was satisfactory, and it was an insuperable obstacle to their making any profession of religion or coming into the church. They made a mental protest against a theory of conversion which leads men into a fog-bank and leaves them there without showing them any certain steps by which they may come into the light of truth and into the peace of certainty. As men come to better understand the laws which govern man's moral and intellectual nature, they are asking themselves the question, why, in the most serious concern of man's life—his conversion from sin to righteousness—God does not proceed, as He does everywhere else, in harmony with the nature of the being with whom he is dealing. Has God given to man a will? Then He will respect that will. Has He so constituted man, morally and intellectually,

Helps to Faith

that the truth is adapted to the mind as light is to the eye or sound to the ear? If so, then He will use truth to enlighten men's understanding and will appeal to their reason and to their higher nature with motives adapted thereto. In other words, if God has created man a free moral agent He will not violate that freedom or override his will by His omnipotence, but will seek to win him from his evil ways through the very laws of his being, and not in violation of these laws.

It is admitted by all that faith is an essential condition of man's salvation. The power to believe, or the faith-faculty, is a part of the common human inheritance. But how is faith in God as Father and in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord to be cultivated in the heart of men and brought to the point of loving obedience? The newer view of conversion recognizes the necessity of the gospel of Christ to accomplish that work, seeing that it is divinely adapted to that end. The relation between cause and effect here is not beyond the reach of man to discern. "The gospel is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth," because faith is the channel through which the great realities of the gospel come into the

Conversion

human soul as regenerative and controlling forces of life. Repentance, which is a change of mind or purpose, comes from this new vision of unseen realities, and especially from the vision of Christ as he is presented to us in the gospel. Why pursue the old way leading unto death, when faith points out a new way leading unto life? Obedience to this divine Lord instead of disobedience naturally follows, and thus man's adjustment to God and his consequent forgiveness of sins and peace of mind, and his reception of the Holy Spirit, are all brought within the range, and come about under the operation, of the laws which govern man's nature.

This is not to say, of course, that there is no mystery in the process of imparting the new life. Life is always mysterious. Science with all its advancement has only deepened its mysteries. But the mystery is on God's side, and in His work, and does not pertain to man's duty. Every step which man is required to take to bring him into reconciliation with God, and into the enjoyment of life eternal, is clearly marked out, and is based upon reasons which commend themselves to our human judgment. The farmer does not have to understand the

Helps to Faith

mysterious laws which govern vegetable life and growth in order to raise bountiful crops. He only needs to know what are the conditions which he must fulfill in the preparation of soil, in the planting of proper seed, and in the cultivation of the ground, in order to secure the desired harvest. He does his part and trusts to God to do the rest. In like manner men may understand the human conditions of salvation and conform to them and receive the blessing attached thereto, without being able to solve all the mysteries of God's operations in the realm of the spirit, or the manner in which the truth of God is transmuted through faith into life and character.

It has been a mistake of theology in the past to attempt to solve the problems which relate to God's being and the methods of His operation which lie beyond the reach of the finite, and to enshroud in impenetrable mystery the process of man's conversion on the human side, which should be as clear as a sunbeam. The scientific spirit of the age demands that these crude and superstitious views of conversion which have prevailed in the past, and the methods which grew out of those views, be laid aside for a more rational as well as a more

Conversion

scriptural view of conversion and of the proper methods of bringing it about. It will be found on examination that the New Testament method of procedure in the matter of conversion conforms to the latest psychology and the most scientific thought. This is not because the apostles and first preachers were scientists or psychologists, but because, under the guidance of the Spirit, they followed the simple and natural order of reaching the human mind and heart, and had no theories touching the divine method of operation to defend or propagate.

It remains to be said that these observations relate mainly to the matter of the conversion of responsible adults. That there is a preparatory work that goes on in the child-mind and heart beneath the power of human observation and human analysis, will not be denied by any one who has thoughtfully considered the subject. The silent and unseen forces of parental and home influence, the unnoted but potent power of school life, early companionships, books, observation and quiet reflection, through all of which, we can not doubt, the Spirit of God is working to mold and fashion the young life—all these lie within a realm which has been too little considered and understood, but

Helps to Faith

which, after all our study and investigation, possesses elements of power and results which will elude the keenest observation. We may be sure, however, that within this realm, as well as in others, God works according to the laws of our being, and that it is within our power to surround infancy and childhood with such an atmosphere and such influences as will tend to bring it into line with God's purpose and will, with little or nothing of that change in the current and tendency of one's life which accompanies adult conversion.

IX

A DIVIDED CHURCH

THERE can be no doubt that a subtle and widespread influence against the acceptance of Christianity has gone forth from the divided condition of the Christian world. The objection may not often voice itself in definite terms, and yet whoever questions closely that large class of moral, well-disposed people who are not church members, will find, prominent among the reasons which have prevented them from making an open confession of Christ, this divided state of the Church. Perhaps they have intimate friends who are in different religious bodies, or even the family may be divided by ecclesiastical lines, and they hesitate to take an overt step in religion that would seem to put a barrier between them and those they love.

Then again the very fact of these existing creeds of diverse doctrines has engendered a doubt, in many minds, as to whether there is any certainty upon which they can build for eternity. They feel that where learned men

Helps to Faith

and able theologians differ, they may all be wrong, and in this unsettled state of mind they naturally postpone any decisive action of a religious character. These men ask themselves, if they do not ask others, why, if the way of Christianity be so simple and plain that "the wayfaring men, yea fools, shall not err therein," as the Bible declares, there are so many different denominations with differing views expressed in conflicting creeds, and directing their energies often against each other, rather than against a common foe? When the advocates of Christianity are considering the causes which are keeping so many people out of the church and away from its public services, they ought not to overlook this obstacle, which has proven to be a serious barrier in the way of many.

There are a few things which may be said by way of removing this obstacle out of the way of honest inquirers after the truth. One must study the history of the Church and the causes which gave rise to denominationalism, to understand why we have these existing divisions in the Church, and that he may not attach undue blame to those who have inherited from the past these denominational peculiarities and distinctions. He must follow the Church in its

A Divided Church

great apostasy until it became a tremendous spiritual despotism, setting aside the ordinances of the gospel and the plain teaching of Christ, and instituting dogmas and practices of its own devising, until its corruptions and abuses cried to heaven for reform. He must then mark the rise of the Protestant reformation of the sixteenth century, and how, out of this emancipation from the tyranny of Rome, there sprang, one after another, the great Protestant religious reformations, each of which was an effort to restore some neglected feature or features of the original Church, or to get nearer to the divine ideal.

It is easy enough for us who live in the light of all the accumulated experience of the past to see the mistakes which were made by these reformers, and to point out a way by which they might have maintained unity among themselves, while enjoying their newly-found freedom in Christ. But it is unfair to judge the reformers of past centuries by the light which shines upon us to-day, for much of which we are indebted to the experiences of these men of God, who were loyal to the truth as they were enabled to see the truth. It should always be remembered, in judging these denominations,

Helps to Faith

that they are efforts, as Isaac Errett once said, to get away from Rome and not to return to Rome. Denominationalism, therefore, in so far as it involves division walls consisting of unauthorized tests of fellowship, is an imperfect and therefore temporary phase of Church life; but it is not conscious and intentional rejection of the authority of Christ and the substitution, in its place, of human authority. This much is due, in the way of fairness and justice, and to the truth of history concerning the present denominational state of the Church.

It does not follow, of course, from what we have said, that Protestantism ought not to outgrow its divided condition as it comes into the clearer light of truth and into a larger apprehension of Christ's aim in the establishment of his Church. It should be said, also, that growth in the direction of unity, and away from the denominational narrowness and bitterness of the past, has been most decided and gratifying during the last quarter of a century. The friends of Christian unity who believe that it can be realized only as the denominations exchange their doctrinal bases of fellowship for the personal Christ, the original and unchangeable creed of Christianity, have great reason to

A Divided Church

rejoice at the progress which has been made in this direction. We must not expect too much of human nature. It must be with the coming of Christian unity, as with the kingdom of God itself, "first the blade, then the ear, and after that the full corn in the ear." It can only come by growth, and whatever tends to enhance the spiritual life of the Church tends to hasten the day when Christ's followers shall be one, even as He prayed that they might be one. The growing disposition among these different religious bodies to co-operate for the furtherance of common ends is proof that the Spirit of God is moving among them to bring about, in due time, such unification as will exalt Christ, glorify God, and result in the conversion of the world.

Meantime, what course is there left for those who are willing to become Christians, but who do not see their way to accept any of the denominational forms or creedal statements of Christianity? To such it ought to be enough to say, You may become disciples of our Lord Jesus Christ, taking His yoke upon you and learning of Him, without encumbering yourselves with any human accretions which have gathered about the religion of Christ in its

Helps to Faith

passage through the centuries. There is a common creed which all Christians accept. Faith in Jesus Christ, as the Son of God and the Savior of the world, is the creed that underlies every evangelical Church in Christendom, and is the inspiration and basis of all Christian life and activity. Accept that and the religious world will not call in question the orthodoxy of your creed. If you obey him in that "one baptism" which symbolizes his burial and resurrection (Rom. 6:4), and rise from it to walk in newness of life, no religious body in Christendom will call in question the validity of your baptism. If you manifest the spirit of Jesus Christ in your daily life, seeking to follow his example and to please him in all things, no Church in Christendom will call in question your Christian character. If you object to wearing party names, whether of men, or of religious ordinances, or of forms of government, it is your privilege to wear only those scriptural names which are applicable to all the children of God, and which are esteemed and honored by all who revere the name of Christ. If you object to the acceptance of any human book of discipline as binding upon your conscience, and as an authoritative guide, you may

A Divided Church

take the New Testament alone as your rule of faith and practice, and no body of Christians in all the world will call its authority in question.

What we mean to say, then, is that, in spite of all our denominationalism, there is a common Christianity to which all are gradually coming, and which anyone to-day may accept at once, standing fast in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made him free, on a broad and unchallenged foundation where he may have fellowship with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ, and where he may be free to receive all the truth which God may have shown him in nature or in revelation. To this common Christianity all may come to whom the divisions, creeds, party names and party spirit are an offense, and who are content to be free and untrammelled disciples of Jesus Christ, wearing his name, imbibing his spirit and seeking to be transformed into his likeness. It is this common Christianity which is receiving emphasis to-day, while denominational peculiarities are being remanded to a subordinate place. If this process continues denominationalism will be reduced to a point where it will cease to divide, and will therefore cease to be an obstacle to faith, and to the conversion of the world.

X

MORAL DELINQUENCIES

It may be safely asserted that the average church member has no adequate conception of the influence which his life exerts either for or against the Christianity which he professes. If professed Christians knew that the salvation of many of those with whom they associate depends on their character and conduct, and had any just realization of the responsibility which this fact imposes upon them, it would hardly be possible for them to live the kind of life which many of them do. When men of the world see that the professing Christians with whom they do business carry no more conscience with them into their business dealings than they themselves do, and indulge quite as freely, and sometimes more so, in doubtful methods of gain, the inevitable effect is to raise a question in their minds as to the practical value of Christianity and its power to mold human life and character according to higher ideals.

It can not be doubted that the greatest nega-

Moral Delinquencies

tive force in the world to-day working against the progress of Christianity is the failure of those who profess to follow Christ to be governed by his teaching and example. The greatest evangelistic force in the world is the silent, outraying influence of Christian lives, and this force could be indefinitely multiplied if all who confess the name of Christ would manifest his spirit in all the relations of life. This is what Jesus meant when he said to his disciples, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." This is what he meant by saying to his disciples, "Ye are the salt of the earth;" "Ye are the light of the world." It is clear from these statements that he was not relying alone upon the public proclamation of the gospel by chosen ministers to convert the world, but that he expected this preaching to be mightily reinforced by the pure characters, the good works, the noble and unselfish lives, of all believers. We do not need better preaching so much as we need better living; not greater sermons so much as greater and holier deeds done in the name of Christ. Heresies in doctrine are not so mis-

Helps to Faith

chievous in their results as heresies in life and conduct.

But we come now to deal with these moral delinquencies considered from the point of view of those who, while troubled by them, are nevertheless anxious concerning their own moral welfare, and who would gladly accept Christ if they felt assured that they could find in him the help which they need, not only to escape the sins of the past, but to live purer and better lives in the future. To all such persons it ought to be sufficient to say, that neither Christ nor his religion can be held responsible for the failures in the lives of men who merely profess his name, but who do not really trust him nor live in personal union and fellowship with him. No one attaches any blame to the physician for not curing the patient who does not follow his prescription and submit himself fully to his care. In the very nature of the case no one can share in the life of Christ—the life which he came to impart to men—without coming into and maintaining union with him. Every man's own conscience tells him that in so far as his Christian life has been a failure it has not been because of Christ's inability to keep him in the way of righteousness, but because of his

Moral Delinquencies

own unwillingness to commit himself fully to Christ's way.

Besides that, the correct way of ascertaining whether there is any reality in the alleged power of Christ to purify the life and strengthen the character, delivering the soul from the power of sin and making it to rejoice in a new-found liberty, is not to inquire how many professed Christians have *failed* to realize these results in their lives, but whether any have *realized* them. One indisputable case of a person who has been transformed by the power of the gospel of Christ from a life of sin and wretchedness to a life of righteousness and of joyful service to God and humanity, is an unanswerable argument, showing the reality of Christ's power and its availability for human use. But when you multiply one such instance by many millions, the proof becomes irresistible to an honest mind, that is simply seeking to know whether or not God has really placed salvation from sin within the reach of men. Every one who will take pains to inquire can find numerous instances of both men and women whose lives have been literally transformed, and who attribute this change in their lives to their

Helps to Faith

faith in Christ and the submission of their lives to him.

If one fails to feel the force of this argument he may be sure that the fault lies within himself. It ought to be more generally understood than it is, by men who claim that it is difficult for them to believe in God, in Christ, in the gospel, in the reality of the spiritual world, and immortality, that moral delinquencies in one's own life are the most universal source of skepticism. This matter has already been adverted to in another place, but we refer to it again here because it has a very vital connection with the topic under consideration. If one be false to the light which he already possesses, if he be disloyal to his convictions of truth and duty, his spiritual nature is in no condition for the reception of further truth or for the increase of his faith. The best possible rule for every one troubled with unbelief is to make an earnest effort to live as nearly right as he knows how, and in this struggle to live up to his highest ethical standard, his soul comes into a sympathetic attitude toward Christ, and he will soon be prepared to accept his teaching and then to accept him personally, as the very Friend and

Moral Delinquencies

Helper he needs to enable him to live the truest and best life.

Not only is it true that many are hindered from coming to a robust and joyous faith because of their moral delinquencies, but it is also true that many believers, by reason of their failure to be loyal to their faith, become skeptical. That is a significant statement of Paul in his letter to Timothy (1:19) where he says, "War the good warfare; holding faith and a good conscience; which some having thrust from them made shipwreck concerning the faith." Notice the intimate relation between "faith and a good conscience." The "some" referred to, including Hymenæus and Alexander, thrust from them "a good conscience" and then soon "made shipwreck concerning the faith." It is not difficult to see how this works. Every man seeks, naturally, to have some sort of harmony between what he believes and what he lives. If he is unwilling to bring his life up to his faith, then he seeks to bring his faith down to his life. In other words, he seeks self-justification for his conduct by denying the reality of those facts and truths which would require a different kind of conduct. Every man, therefore, who is really in quest of faith, or who desires

Helps to Faith

to keep the faith which he has, and to enlarge it, should look well to the secret spring of all his actions—the heart. If purity of thought and desire, and sincerity, abide there, and if there be an earnest effort to be true to what is truest and best within him, faith in Christ will come, and when it does come it will abide, and grow stronger and clearer until the light of the perfect day.

No amount of moral delinquencies in the lives of other men, without or within the Church, will prove an insuperable obstacle to faith to one who, recognizing his own moral deficiency, seeks to remedy it by conforming to the highest ideal, and who at last finds that ideal in Jesus Christ. Yielding himself in loving obedience to the personal Christ, he realizes that emancipation from the thralldom of sin for which his soul had longed, and there opens up before him such a vision of progress in righteousness and in truth as fills his soul with an unutterable joy, and gives to human life a meaning and a dignity of which he had not dreamed in the days before he had seen Christ and had learned of him. As he looks back now from the height to which he has attained, by the grace of God, he sees that the beginning of his

Moral Delinquencies

salvation was in his purpose to be true to the light that was in him, until that light led him to the feet of him who is "the light of the world."

XI

THE SLOW PROGRESS OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

ATTENTION has already been given to the evils within the Church, both collectively as to its divisions, differing creeds, etc., and the moral delinquencies of its individual members, considered as obstacles to faith. Another difficulty in the way of faith is the prevalence of sin and crime in the world, and the reign of unrighteousness, after nineteen centuries of Christian history. There are those who ask with honest doubt, perhaps, why it is, if Christianity has a divine Founder who established his kingdom on the earth at the beginning of the Christian era, that it has not made more progress in the world than it has during all the centuries of its existence. They point to war between nations, with all its direful consequences, to the existence of governments which oppress their subjects and deprive them of their just rights, to peoples and tribes who yet practice idolatry and grovel in the lowest and vilest superstitions, to nations where womanhood is

The Slow Progress of the Kingdom

dishonored, childhood neglected and the poor and helpless uncared for, to the prevalence, even within Christian nations, of murder, thieving, robbery, lust and other crimes and vices, the municipal corruption which prevails in our large cities, the slum districts where squalor, ignorance and vice hold their carnival, to the legalized liquor traffic with all its baneful influences, to the inordinate greed for gain, which seems to dominate the commercial world, and ask, if the kingdom of God means the abolishment of all these evils, why do they flourish in the land nineteen hundred years after the birth of him who inaugurated a new era and established a kingdom of truth and righteousness?

Such is the difficulty as it looms up in the minds of some, while others, still more pessimistic in their mood, claim that the world is growing worse instead of better, which, of course, implies that Christianity is a failure, and that the kingdom of God is not able to cope with the kingdom of darkness. There is little use to argue with pessimism, which is a mental or moral infirmity, but there is something to be said to those who see, in the present moral condition of the world, an obstacle to honest faith. If one wishes to really know

Helps to Faith

whether the kingdom of God is making any progress in the world, he must not form his conclusion on short views, either in time or space. It may be that in a given community, within a limited space of time, there may be retrogression in morals and religion; but when one takes in long periods of time and a wider area, it is not difficult to see that the kingdom is making substantial progress. Let any one, for instance, compare the condition of the world as it was at the time of the birth of Christ with its present condition. Let him note the low standard of morals which prevailed at that time, as depicted by Paul in the Roman letter, or as described in such works as "Ben Hur" or "Quo Vadis" or as revealed in the ruins of Pompeii and Herculaneum. Let him consider the condition of womanhood, of childhood, the number of slaves and their legal status, the cruelty of the people, as manifested in their amusements and in their wars, the utter prostitution of religion to serve the baser passions of men, and the feeling of despair which was taking possession of men's hearts as they witnessed the steady downward tendency of things, and then contrast that with our present civilization, with whatever faults it possesses, and if he

The Slow Progress of the Kingdom

does not see that the kingdom of God has made splendid progress, it must be because his own moral vision is obscured.

Then the kingdom of God was represented by its Founder, and a few disciples that were gathered about him, who imperfectly understood him and his mission, in the midst of the great pagan world and the vast Roman empire in which were intrenched all these evils. Note how that little company of disciples has swelled into a mighty host which no man can number; how that Galilean Carpenter, "despised and rejected of men," has marched through the centuries, a conquering Hero, winning evermore a larger dominion over men, extending his influence over a wider domain of human life, molding laws, institutions and governments into higher and better forms, and building a new civilization, until he is to-day, beyond all comparison, the most potential factor in human history, and rising, year by year, toward the zenith of his power. While the Roman empire, then mistress of the world, with her tyranny, cruelty and idolatry, has long since passed away, the kingdom of Jesus Christ stretches over a wider domain now than ever before, and its influence was never so potent

Helps to Faith

over the life of mankind as it is to-day.

It should be remembered, too, that the kingdom of God has made this progress under difficulties and against obstacles which would have proved insuperable to any cause less divine. It had scarcely gotten out of the swaddling bands of its Judaistic environment, when it fell into the hands of Greek philosophy, and underwent a process of speculative analysis and of scholastic theologizing, until its simplicity and power must have been lost very largely to the common people. A little later Roman scholastics and theologians began to organize it after the manner of the Roman empire, until they had built up the greatest religious despotism which the world has ever known. Through long centuries Christianity had to do its work upon human life, through this speculative theology and ecclesiastical tyranny. When the reformation came under the leadership of Luther, there followed, unfortunately, through succeeding centuries, the building up of division walls among Protestants, which, as we have already seen, have remained, yet with waning power, until the present time. That Christianity has prevailed against all these obstacles and is gradually overcoming them, is one of the

The Slow Progress of the Kingdom

strongest proofs of its divine origin and power.

At present the tendency toward unification of the forces of Protestantism is one of the marked features of our religious life. No less marked and no less important is the tendency to get away from the confusion and authority of human creeds and confessions of faith, and get back to the simplicity which is in Christ, and to the Christianity which he taught and exemplified. We may, therefore, reasonably anticipate much more rapid progress for the kingdom of God in the future than it has made during the preceding centuries of its history. With the Church united in Christ and under Christ, intent only on making his reign universal over the hearts and lives of men, and laying under contribution all science, art, inventions and discoveries, and consecrating the world's accumulated knowledge and wealth for the furtherance of the kingdom of God and its righteousness, the strongest faith can not anticipate the rapid progress and the magnificent achievements which are to mark the history of Christianity during the present century. But whether the time be long or short, there can be no doubt that the kingdoms of this world, with all their glory and progress and power, are to

Helps to Faith

become the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ,
to whom be dominion and majesty and power,
forever and ever! Amen.

XII

THE CREED OF UNBELIEF

It might be well before closing this consideration of the things which make for faith, to take a glance at the negative side of this subject and see what is the creed of unbelief, and whether that offers something better suited to our human nature than that which faith offers. If the honest inquirer after truth, as he has followed us in these pages, feels that there are difficulties in the way of faith, after all is said and done, it is believed that by a candid look at the other side he will perceive that the difficulties in the way of unbelief are far more numerous and vastly more serious.

If the testimony of our religious instincts, as to the existence of a superior Being worthy of the soul's adoration, is not to be accepted how are we to account for these instincts and spiritual perceptions? Why has man a religious and moral nature that cries out for the living and loving God if there be no such God to answer its cry? As the eye implies light, the ear sound, the mind truth, why does not the hun-

Helps to Faith

ger of the human heart imply that which satisfies this hunger? How is human nature, as we know it, with its longings, its spiritual capacities, its deathless aspirations, to be reconciled with a universe that has in it nothing to answer these high demands? Why these deep questionings of the human soul if there can be no satisfactory answers given to its questions?

Schumann's "Warum" has only interpreted the questioning of the universal heart of man when it asks: "Who am I? What am I for? How came I here? Under what law or lawgiver am I? What forces help to make and what to mar me? And what is my destiny?" Dr. Lyman Abbott has well said: "To each of these questions Christianity has a definite answer ready. It replies: 'You are a child of God; put here for character-building; by your Father; under his authority; dependent on him for success; and with immortal, incorruptible, eternal life your true destiny.'"^{*} These are great and definite answers to deep and vitally important questions. They are answers that harmonize with what we know of man and the phenomena of his higher nature, and amply justify man's existence on the earth. They

^{*} "In Aid of Faith," pp. 15, 16.

The Creed of Unbelief

make life worth living. What answer does the creed of unbelief give to these questions?

If we question pure materialism, its answer to the questions above given are: "You are simply organized clay—a splendid animal, at the head of the class mammalia; you are here for no purpose above enjoyment of the present; you came here by accident, are under no law or lawgiver except that of human government; there is no guide to the forces that make or mar except experience, which teaches what gives the greatest amount of present enjoyment, and there is no destiny for you except death, dissolution and eternal oblivion." We need not pause here to suggest the insuperable difficulties in the way of such a creed. They may all be summed up in one question: "How has this accidental creature, man, risen to so high a scale of intellectual and moral worth as to enable him to spurn such a philosophy, except in rare and abnormal specimens of the race, and frame another worthy of his high nature and destiny?" Not only has the stream risen above its source, according to this theory, but we have the unheard of phenomenon of a mighty stream without any source!

Agnosticism, the modern form of the infidel

Helps to Faith

creed, has little better to offer. To all the questions of origin, duty and destiny which the soul may ask, its stereotyped reply is: "We do not know. If there be a God we can not know him, and if there be a life beyond we have no certain means of knowing that such is the case, or anything as to its character. We are here, we know not why; we are going, we know not whither." Does this kind of an answer furnish any solace to the heart that is grappling with the mystery of human existence and destiny? Does it impart any strength to the human soul to bear its burdens, perform its difficult duties and resist the temptations that beset us here? Even the advocates of such a creed would hardly claim this for it. Some of them have been known to confess that the Christian view of life, here and hereafter, produces better results in the way of government, society and all that makes up what we call civilization than their own negative creed. But what incredible thing have we here: that a base superstition, such as Christianity is said to be, produces a higher and truer civilization than all the truth in the universe can produce? The man that can accept that proposition need not hesitate at any monstrous absurdity which may be offered him for

The Creed of Unbelief

his acceptance. "If weak thy faith why choose the harder side?"

One has only to approach near enough the verge of that creed which unbelief presents in more or less chaotic form to look over the awful precipice, in order to see the abysmal depths of darkness and despair into which the world must plunge if it should go that way. But faith has taken the aggressive in these days and is demanding that unbelief shall give an account of itself before the bar of human reason and the facts of human nature. It is saying to the apostles of unbelief: "If you do not accept the Bible view of the world and of man, as originating in the creative act of God, how do you account for them?" Nor will it accept the superficial reply of atheistic science, that *evolution* is a sufficient explanation of all that is. What is the explanation of *evolution*? Who is the *evolver*? Evolution is a theory of the *method* of creation. If it proves to be the true theory, it only establishes the way in which God has created the world, and does not dispense with the Creator! What has unbelief to say about so wonderful a plan of creation as evolution is said to be, with no infinite intelligence to plan it and no infinite power to work,

Helps to Faith

according to its method, in bringing into being this universe? It is dumb before such a question and seeks refuge in agnosticism.

In like manner, believers are asking the advocates of materialism and agnosticism to give some intelligible explanation of sin, of the consciousness of guilt, of the need of pardon, and of all those spiritual phenomena associated with religion. But for none of these things has the creed of unbelief any satisfactory explanation. How can a theory which sacrifices God and His self-manifestations to men by its pre-suppositions against the supernatural, which has no place in its philosophy for Christ and the incarnation, give any adequate solution of the problems arising out of man's origin, nature and destiny? Evidently he who would find a satisfactory answer to the deepest and most vital questions of his soul must turn away from the cold and barren negations of unbelief to the creed which has as its sum and substance not a doctrinal abstraction, but the divine personality, who said: "All things have been delivered unto me of my Father: and no one knoweth the Son, save the Father; neither doth any know the Father save

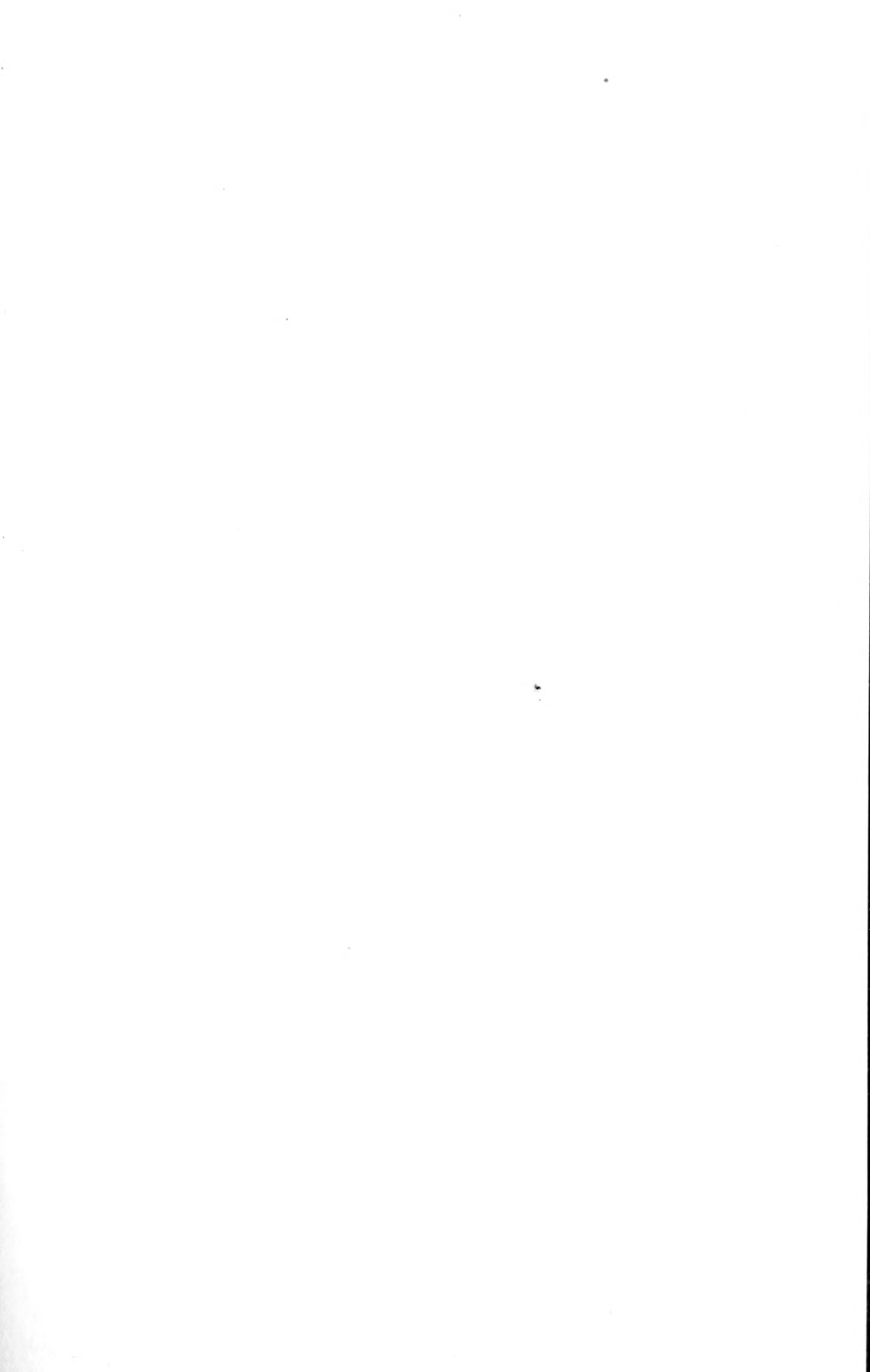
The Creed of Unbelief

the Son and he to whomsoever the Son willeth to reveal him." (Matt. 11:27, 28).

To the Son of God, then, must the soul-burdened inquirer come for an answer to those questions which relate to the being and character of God and man's relations and duties to him, and which, therefore, involve his eternal destiny. To this quest of truth he invites us in the gracious invitation: "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls." (Matt. 11:28, 29.)

Here, then, at the feet of Jesus, the Man of Galilee, whither our investigations have led us, let us take our place as learners and find rest to our souls. He will not only answer our questions, by showing us the Father and teaching us His will, but He will bear our burdens, forgive our transgressions, fulfill our highest aspirations, and lead us on in the path of spiritual progress until our faith shall brighten into perfect vision and we shall see Him as He is and be like Him.





OCT 2 1903

Deacidified using the Bookkeeper process.
Neutralizing agent: Magnesium Oxide
Treatment Date: April 2005

PreservationTechnologies

A WORLD LEADER IN PAPER PRESERVATION

111 Thomson Park Drive
Cranberry Township, PA 16066
(724) 779-2111

BP
121

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



0 014 022 208 2